

A True Story of a Scout in Times of War

Part I

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Prologue

From May 15th, 1940 to May 5th, 1945, the Kingdom of the Netherlands was occupied by German forces. As the country is situated between the British Isles and Germany, its airspace was used by the Royal Air Force and the United States Army Air Force when on their way from English airfields to their targets in Germany. Especially between 1943 and 1945, the Dutch saw enormous squadrons of USAF aircraft that crossed their country during the day time, whilst at night they lay listening to the roar of the RAF's bombers' engines. It was pleasing to their eyes and music to their ears. But more than 2,500 planes of the RAF and 1,750 US planes were brought down over Dutch territory. About 25% of them crashed into the Dutch coastal waters of the Zuidersee (now the Zuiderzee), which, after World War Two, was reclaimed from the sea as farming land.

Many British and American crew members managed to save their lives by bailing out and parachuting to land. One out of seven was hidden by the Resistance and often, many months later, were able to report back to base in England.

During and after the Battle of Arnhem, in September 1944, British paratroopers who were cut off from their units escaped into the forests and managed to contact the Dutch Underground. Most of them were hidden and later ferried across the rivers to the Liberated part of the country. A few joined the Resistance units that harassed the Germans until the arrival of the Canadian Army in April 1945.

In the summer of 1944, the various Resistance groups were united in the NBS - *Nederlandse Binnenlandse Strijdkrachten* or the Netherlands Forces of the Interior. Operating behind the enemy lines, they received their orders from Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Forces.

The story of J., based on solid facts, was written during an unforgettable week of September 1994 when - 50 years after the event - "The Battle of Arnhem" was remembered again, not only by the surviving British and Polish veterans, but also by Dutch civilians, including the generations born afterwards, who still have not forgotten, and never will forget for as long as they live. During this week US, British, Canadian and Polish veterans were given a hearty welcome in the southern part of the country when they came to commemorate - with the Dutch - their dead.

In the years before World War Two (1939-1945) there were very few cars in the Netherlands. The means of transportation were either by public transport - trams, trains, coaches - or by bicycle. Bikes were used by nearly everyone to go to work or to school and were also used to go for long or short pleasure rides in the days off work or school. Scout troops or patrols used to go weekend camping on their bikes, carrying their private as well as their troop's gear - tents, pots and pans - on the bikes' carriers. Scout troops used to travel to their summer camps in this way, and often Rover Scouts used to go on long expeditions on their bikes.

In spring, summer and autumn, J.'s troop used to do a lot of weekend camping. Once school had ended on Saturday mornings, J. used to hurry home, put on his uniform, load his camping equipment onto his bike, and cycle to the place where his troop met. They then cycled from Amsterdam, either to the forests near Hilversum, or to the sand dunes on the North Sea coast for some weekend camping. Distances of about 50 kilometers each way were no exception. Once a month a troop weekend was held, the other weekends were simple patrol camps.

During the summer holidays, there was a two-week summer camp. These were mostly held in the forest area in the central part of the country, often a day's cycle trip of more than 75 kilometers. As usual, all their equipment was carried on the backs of their bikes. Sometimes, the troop cycled

to the Amsterdam docks and boarded a boat sailing to the other side of the Zuydersea, where they landed in the old port of Harderwijk and cycled from there to their chosen campsite.

Regretfully, J. was only able to participate in the 1938 and 1939 summer camps, which were held in the forest to the west of the city of Arnhem.

Mobilization

The war and the mobilization affected Dutch Scouting. Many Scoutmasters, Rover Scouts and older Scouts had to leave home to join the armed forces. J.'s two brothers were called up. The eldest - who was a sergeant - was stationed in the extreme south-western part of the country, near to the Belgian border and the North Sea coast. The other was a corporal-gunner in a Dutch anti-aircraft battery, somewhere between the seaport of Rotterdam and Den Haag (The Hague), the seat of Government, headquarters of the armed forces and the home of the Dutch Royal family.

The Scout groups carried on, led by the remaining Scoutmasters, Rover Scouts, former Scouts and, above all, the Patrol Leaders. When the conscripted Scoutmasters were on weekend leave, they never failed to turn up. But new tasks also had to be undertaken. Most of the Scouts, as well as the Guides, were attached either to the Red Cross, or the Air-Raid Precautions Service. J. and some of his patrol-mates were trained to be Red Cross cycle couriers and so, in the very cold winter of 1939/1940, Scouting was carried on as often as possible, with much attention given to First Aid, rescue and pioneering. This additional training took up most of their available leisure time.

On Thursday, May 9th, 1940, J. celebrated his 14th birthday and his patrol attended his party. It was on that evening that he was chosen to be their Second, which was his finest birthday present. They also discussed the coming Whitsun camp, which was to start on Saturday the 11th, when, at 6:00 am, they were to mount their loaded bikes and cycle 50 kilometers to the forests in the central part of the country. It was late when the boys left and J.'s family had gone to bed.

Invasion

Their slumbers did not last long! At about 3:00 am everyone was woken up by the increasing drone of airplanes, the rapidly firing ack-ack, and the bombs exploding on nearby Schiphol Airport. J. jumped out of bed, ran to the window and was just in time to see a burning German plane fall from the skies. He saw other planes dropping their bombs and understood that the war had begun. He washed, put on his Scout uniform, ate a few slices of bread his mother had got ready and said his goodbyes. He mounted his bike and cycled to the Red Cross HQ where he - like many other Scouts - reported for duty.

The last time the Netherlands had been involved in an armed conflict had been in 1831. It had not been drawn into the war of 1870 between France and Germany and had maintained its neutrality during World War One. Consequently, the population did not know what war was really like. J. also had no inkling. Later he had to admit that he thought it all a great adventure. He raced on his bike through the more-or-less deserted streets, which seemed so different after being damaged by artillery fire. He reported to the central post where he met many of his fellow Scout bike couriers. The boys were given a steel helmet, painted white with a Red Cross on the front and a Red Cross armband, which gave them official status. They were assigned to Red Cross units or Air Raid Posts.

During the hours and days that followed J. cycled all over Amsterdam, and sometimes to places outside the city, carrying messages and parcels. It was not without danger, as the shrapnel from exploding ack-ack shells fired at the German planes fell back to earth. Protected only by his steel helmet, on he cycled and, in a way, enjoyed the experience, the more so as, during air-raid alarms, everybody else was obliged to go to the shelters. He enjoyed the danger - after all, 'boys will be boys' and, to a 14-year-old, this was great adventure. J. was often on duty for a full

twenty-four hour spell. In-between cycle trips, meals could be eaten and, now and then, and there was a possibility of having a bit of shuteye. When he was near his home, he was able to drop in for a few minutes to show his folks that he was still alive and cycling. He was mighty proud to show that he was being of service.

The afternoon and evening when the news of the surrender was made public and the fighting ceased, J. and his mates were still on duty. J. was on his way to the docks when heavy, loud explosions rocked Amsterdam. High columns of flames and black clouds of oily smoke rose into the blue evening sky when the oil and petrol tanks in the port were blown up. It was an inferno of explosions, fire and smoke. J. slept little that night and was on duty again early next morning. His job was just as before. In the afternoon, cycling to the eastern part of the city, he met the first German troops on their way to the city centre. He tried to ignore them and they ignored him. Later, on his way back, he found that at the city's outskirts the Germans had posted roadblocks and stopped everybody, asking for identity papers. J., with his white steel helmet now resting on his cycle lamp, his khaki Scout uniform and his Red Cross armband, was not stopped at all but waved on. Most of the Scouts were now transferred to the Red Cross. Some were sent home after days of continuous duty for a meal, a bath and a good night's sleep in their own beds. They were, however, told to return the next morning.

A new task was awaiting them. There was a lot of war damage; rail and road bridges spanning the many waterways had been blown up. It would take some time to restore the transport systems and the telephone cables. Thousands of civilians wanted to know whether husbands or sons in the army had survived the short war. The Red Cross began registering names but it was not so easy to reach the troops to find out information. It was decided to send out the cyclists again, wearing their Red Cross armbands. Their task was to locate the Dutch army units and to collect the names of those still alive and those who had been killed. To J.'s chagrin, it was only Rover Scouts, aged over 17, who were chosen to go on these expeditions. They cycled out of the big cities and into the country, but with roads and bridges destroyed or blocked, they sometimes had to make long detours. Finding their way through destroyed villages and onto the battlefields was not easy and they were gone for days. Wherever they met Dutch soldiers, they took their names and addresses. At the time, no one knew what was going to happen, but the general expectation was that the soldiers would be transported to Germany to POW camps for the duration of the war. Some soldiers who had 'civvies' with them put them on and went home, but not all could. Most of the Rover Scouts stayed away for days, sleeping and eating whenever it was possible. When they returned, lists were compiled and the younger Scouts were sent to inform the relatives of those who had survived.

Occupation

What would the future bring? No one knew. Everyone was aware of what had happened to Scouting in Germany when the Nazis took over and what they had done to the Austrian Scouts and their leaders, so most expected an immediate ban. When the German army occupied the big cities, many a Scout courier's worried mother feared for the safety and liberty of her boy, still on duty and in full uniform. But nothing happened. The Scouts were left alone.

J.'s brother who had been serving in the ack-ack battery between Rotterdam and Den Haag, arrived back home unannounced in the middle of the night. He had been in the thick of the fighting, but was unharmed. Having obtained a bike, he had simply cycled to Amsterdam during the night of the surrender. There was no news, however from the eldest brother, who had been stationed in the extreme South West, on the North Sea coast near the Belgian border. Later, contact was sought with others belonging to his unit, but they had not returned home either. The Red Cross was asked, and it was learned that most of the Dutch soldiers in this isolated part of the country had crossed into Belgium and that there had been neither news nor trace of them since then. Later efforts by the Red Cross to trace them were also in vain. They were registered as missing, presumably killed.

Some Dutch soldiers taken prisoner during the fighting had already been taken to POW camps in Germany. The Nazis considered the Dutch as being 'strayed-off Germans' who could be expected to see the error of their ways, so Adolf Hitler was prepared to be generous. He permitted all Dutch POWs to go home. As soon as their names had been received and registered, J. and his mates got on their bikes again to inform their relatives.

After a couple of days, efforts were made to restore life to as normal as possible. The Scout couriers were dismissed and like all the other kids, were sent back to school as they were re-opened. So J. went back to school. He did not find it easy after the excitement of the previous weeks, which to him had been a period of adventure. Each boy and each girl had stories to tell of their experiences in those terrible times. A few did not say anything, as they did not want to advertise that they and their parents, belonging to the NSB, had been arrested and locked up. These black sheep were soon sorted out. In J.'s school, only a few pupils turned out to have defected to the Nazis. At first, they stayed silent, but they soon became boastful and often came to school in their *Jeugd Storm* (Youth Storm) uniforms. So they were known and everybody carefully ignored them, not speaking to them and, for safety reasons, falling silent once they were around. They were boycotted, put on ice, and the general motto was "The Enemy and the Traitors are Listening".

Two teachers were no longer in school. One of them had joined the Royal Navy and later they found out that the warship he had been serving on had gone to England. The teacher of German had also not returned. As a Captain in the reserves, he had been in the frontlines and was involved in demobilizing his men. He was, however, safe and sound and was expected to be back at school soon, to teach the boys German once again.

Scouting Continues

A few days later J.'s Scout troop held its first meeting after the surrender. To the boys' utter surprise, their Assistant Scoutmaster was back. As a warrant officer he had been in the defense lines but, after the official surrender, he too had taken off his uniform, changed into his 'civvies', and cycled all the way back to Amsterdam. By doing this, he had escaped being taken Prisoner of War. Scoutmasters and Scouts alike had many experiences to exchange. They had been sad but exciting days, and they had all done their bit.

To everyone's surprise, the Germans made no attempt to control Scouting and Guiding. Scout and Guide officials were told to inform their members that, now that the blackout was in force again, campfires or camping in tents were no longer permitted. Morse-signaling practice, map reading, map drawing and compass practice in the open were also discouraged, as it was too dangerous and could be considered as spying. Normal activities in and around troop headquarters though, could be continued. In that summer of 1940, some troops even had a summer camp in a farmer's barn and some patrols and Rover Scouts, ignoring the regulations, camped in tents secluded by thick undergrowth in hidden places.

Yet things were happening. The Nazis had a plan. There were several Dutch youth organizations such as the co-educational or mixed Socialist Workers Youth (AJC), some uniformed Nationalist and Royalist organizations and some religious youth groups, either Protestant or Roman Catholic and, of course, Scouting and Guiding. There was also the *Nationale Jeugdstorm* or NJS, the youth organization of the NSB, the Dutch National Socialist Movement.

Right from the beginning of the occupation the Nazis tried to lure the Dutch youth by promoting sports and outdoor activities. They also had a plan. During the winter of 1940-1941, the period preceding the above events, all the top leaders of the Dutch youth movements and organizations, including the largest two: Scouting and Guiding, were invited to attend a meeting to discuss the future of Dutch Youth. During his opening speech a leader of the NJS (the National Youth Storm) disclosed the plan. He offered to disband the NJS if the other organizations were also willing to disband and to let their boys and girls join a new National Youth Movement in which all would be united. The delegates could see through the plan and smelt a rat. No one doubted that this new

Movement would have a National Socialist flavor and so the plan was rejected by all but a few who were pro-Nazi.

Scouting Repressed

The Scout and Guide movements were very outspoken in their refusal to accept the plan and so, as far as the Germans were concerned, they simply had to be disbanded. This occurred on April 2nd, 1941. The Nazis gave as their reason that that the two movements were "...instruments of British Imperialism and taking orders from London." The action taken was immediate and came as a surprise. However, some loyal patriots in the Dutch police who had not yet been replaced by Nazi sympathizers, were able to give some advance warning.

Scouting had expected this and was prepared. When the Scout Shops were raided all equipment was confiscated, but some of the staff had removed their stock and hidden it, sometimes in police stations.

Most groups had removed their camping and other equipment from their usual meeting places before their buildings were sealed-up, or allotted to the National Youth Storm or the German Hitler Youth Movements. On the day of disbandment senior Scout officials, District commissioners and upward, were lifted from their beds, taken into custody, and subjected to interrogation. Scouts and Guides were ordered to wrap up their uniforms, badges, and all personal equipment, such as tents, knives, axes, books, maps, compasses, badge collections etc., and deliver these parcels to the nearest police station. The few frightened parents who obeyed this order were not only simply ignored by the still-loyal police officers, but told not to be such cowards and to take their parcels home again.

Scouting Underground

Naturally, all this had its effect on the Scouts and Guides themselves. Like all their compatriots, they already resented the uninvited German "visitors" and, even more, detested and hated the Dutch Nazi traitors. Their anti-German feelings were heightened now by the fact that their movements and activities were forbidden. J.'s group was able to remove all its equipment from its meeting place and to hide it in other places such as private homes. Their wooden Scout Hut was soon sealed by the Nazis, but the leaders and the Rover Scouts kept an eye on it, though when it was learned that the Youth Storm was about to take it over, they showed their anger by burning the place down to the ground.



1943: Secretly making the Scout Promise. Penalty if caught: Concentration Camp for all involved, including their parents

Generally-speaking the Cubs and the Brownies ceased to meet, it being considered as far too dangerous to continue. Most of the Scout troops however, continued in a variety of disguises. Some were turned into unofficial nature-study groups; others took to long-distance walking and First Aid, and fretwork or model building clubs flourished. Some Roman Catholic troops became church choirs. During these activities - dressed in normal clothing - Scouting was continued, but in such a way that should they be raided, their disguise activity was in full evidence. Like most of the Scouts, J. continued working for the Red Cross, but no longer in Scout uniform.

Eventually, the leading members of the Red Cross were replaced by Dutch Nazis or "fellow travelers" and so most of the loyal members resigned or simply faded away, as did J. and his mates. (Later an illegal Red Cross was organized within the framework of the Underground.)

It was inevitable that some Scouts would lose contact with some of their fellows and this happened to J., though he, like the rest, tried to remain in contact with the leaders. J.'s patrol lost their Patrol Leader and so he assumed the role, so that the patrol could carry on. With their uniforms in their school bags, they used to gather in different homes, change into their uniforms and have a regular patrol meeting. That summer, J.'s patrol joined forces with a second patrol and an assistant Scoutmaster, and went camping in a barn in the dense forests - though this was strictly forbidden. Other such camps were betrayed and raided, and the campers arrested by the Nazis. J. and his fellow Scouts were lucky not to be caught.

Whilst J. was still at school, he was lucky to have two teachers who were Scoutmasters. One of them was his English teacher, and the other, previously mentioned, taught German. The German teacher was very much anti-Nazi and whilst nobody at the time realized, these men were involved in the early Resistance. Both teachers "came to the opinion" that some of their pupils did not meet the school's standards and needed extra classes after school hours, to bring them up to par. It was a strange coincidence that all of these "bad" pupils were over 15 and Scouts. The teachers convinced them that it was essential to learn perfect German, so that they would be able to understand everything the Germans said and, similarly, it was a necessity to learn good English so that, when the 'Tommies' came (and no one doubted that they would) they would be able to assist them in every possible way. Under the disguise of extra geography lessons the reading of maps and the use of the compass were also thoroughly revised, so the liberators could have the assistance of good map readers who knew the terrain. As there were a few Youth Stormers and other unreliable characters in the classes, this was, in itself, a risky affair, but J. and his mates took it very seriously and "Mum was the word".

In fact, they never even told their Moms!

Deception

J.'s English teacher - the Scoutmaster - was involved in the 'Pilot Escape Line' and in charge of a collecting point - a "safe house" - situated on a farm some 45 kilometers south of Amsterdam. One day, just before the 1941 summer holidays, he asked J. whether, during the holidays, he would be willing and able to carry some letters on a regular basis. J., at first not knowing what it was all about and what he was actually carrying, agreed, particularly as wherever he delivered, he was getting better meals than at home! In addition, he got new tires and tubes for his bike - things not available in the shops anymore. So he happily cycled from one place to another, sometimes covering distances of 50 to 60 kilometers or more a day, delivering and collecting.

J. passed his final school exams in 1943. A few days later, the postman handed him a registered notice to report for a medical examination for the *Arbeitsdienst*. Neither J. nor his parents felt inclined to obey and, well in advance, J. had discussed the matter with his English teacher. Arrangements had been made for J. to "fade away" and report to the farm some 45 kilometers south of Amsterdam, where, in his holidays, he had been collecting and delivering letters. So one morning he said his goodbyes to his parents, not telling them where he was going, got on his bike and disappeared into thin air. When the police came to arrest him, his parents could only say that their son, a bad, derailed boy, had left home and that they did not know where he was. His father was taken to the police station and interrogated but - being a high-ranking civil servant with "a task important to the German war effort" - he was sent home with the message that as soon as J. was home again, he would have to inform the police. Meanwhile, J. had been given another name and false identity papers. He was now an official member of the Resistance or - as the Nazis would have termed him - "a terrorist and a communist".

His courier services now began in earnest, with longer day trips, sometimes staying overnight before returning the next day, in all kinds of weather and on the flat, sometimes treeless Dutch countryside, where there is always a wind blowing. When the Nazis started confiscating bikes, the couriers were provided with very good, falsified German documents 'proving' that they were allowed to keep their bikes. J. and his mates also got membership cards and other identity documents showing that they were loyal members of the Nazi Youth Storm and, when stopped by German and Dutch Nazis, they showed these and lifted their right arms in the Nazi salute, cheerily shouting "Heil Hitler!" J. even made several trips dressed in a Youth Storm uniform. The disadvantage of all this was that, as an extra burden, he and his mates had to learn all the ranks of the Nazi movement, the SS and the German Armed Forces, so that they did not make any mistakes. A further disadvantage were the dirty looks and the hissed insults of Dutch people, who thought that they really were on the side of the Nazis.

So J. now had the farm - the "safe house" - as his home base, which, he discovered, housed a small group of armed Underground soldiers. To his surprise, one of the first he met was his Jewish Patrol Leader! When this boy and his parents had been ordered to report for deportation to Poland, his father had told him to disappear and that a safe place had been found for him. Though this parting had caused him much pain and sorrow, he had left home. The English teacher had helped him too. Not looking like a Jew at all, he too had received a false identity. (He survived the war, went to Israel and was killed when - then an army officer - he was fighting during the Yom Kippur war.)

On his travels, J. met a variety of British, Canadian and US aircrew members. For the first time he was able to practice his school English (and the extra English he had done just before he left school) on people whose mother tongue it was. In the small, but efficient Underground group there were some former Scouts and Guides and sometimes amongst the Allied airmen there were Scouts too. On St. George's Day, 1944, the Dutch and the Allied Scouts renewed their Promise, whilst overhead they heard the drone of hundreds of British planes on their way to bomb Germany.

There were other activities too and J. was taught how to load and fire a pistol and a Sten gun, how to maintain them and how to throw hand grenades, both German as well as Allied. He proved to be rather good with the pistol and even managed to hit the target 'from the hip', which was exceptional. Yet he was not allowed to be armed during his cycle courier trips. Once, during one of these trips he had, because of the curfew, to stay overnight at a farm in an almost deserted southern part of the country, near the Belgian border, he found that the team running the place was also acting as a reception committee for arms and agents dropped by low-flying Allied planes during the dark nights. That night a supply drop was expected, so he volunteered his help, was armed with a pistol and a Sten gun, and saw the parachutes with their supply containers coming down.

Although this all might sound very adventurous and exciting, it was not a game, but sheer hell. It should not be forgotten that it was all very risky and dangerous. When caught the penalty was the bullet. No one in the Resistance was an adventurer or a hero. Certainly, J. was neither and he was often very much afraid. Sometimes, when stopped and searched by the Germans, he almost wet himself. But he was lucky all the time, which was exceptional too. So many were caught in the act, interrogated, tortured, executed or sent to a concentration camp which also meant certain death.

There was neither heroism nor glamour. Conditions were harsh. Wintertime, summertime, snow, icy roads, rain, gale force winds, and air battles overhead. And after June 6th, ('Decision Day', or D-Day) German convoys on the roads were being attacked by Allied fighter planes and when a courier like J. happened to be near, he had to take cover. But the network had to be maintained and messages carried no matter what, so that the "shipping" of the airmen could run smoothly. And so, all through the winter of 1943/1944, J. and his bike covered hundreds of kilometers and he got to know his country very well. After long trips, there were a few days of rest and good food, and then he had to hit the trail again.