

The Dutch Underground-War.

In this letter I am going to tell you something about the resistance against the Germans in our country. Of course, it is impossible to tell you everything, for that would fill lots of books. So I can describe only part of it.

The resistance against the Germans began at once after they had occupied our country. Not on a large scale, for in the beginning the Germans did not treat our country so badly. Therefore many Dutch people did not recognize the dangerous character of the German Government and it sometimes seemed as if war had ceased and there were only some foreign soldiers wandering about in our country, but not doing much harm.

The Germans tried to win our people's heart by being kind and behaving decently. They sent back our prisoners of war and the first speech of Seyss Inquart, the German governor for the occupied Dutch districts, was flattering and full of honey. He even promised that political activities would be allowed as before and that nothing would be changed in the laws and government. On the birthdays of the Royal Family we could put out the flags and could wear orange cockades.

In this way they hoped to persuade the Dutch to take part in the New European Order. By all this many people did not see the real character of the Nazi-ideologie. But father did. He at once saw that the Germans had come not only to occupy our country, but also to disturb everything and to alter the Christian structure of our society. For him they were the enemies of Christianity and the incarnation of the Anti-Christ and he was right. So from the beginning he spoke to people who had the same ideas and purpose. They made their schemes for the time when the Germans would disappear and tried to wrong him during his stay in the Netherlands. Gradually the enemy showed his cloven foot. The Christian Social Organisation had to be placed under National-Socialist influence, but refused and disappeared. The political parties were forbidden, so that only the National-Socialist League remained, but this party had very few members and hardly any influence. Food was more and more restricted and our stores of corn transported to Germany, our shops robbed, our butter, cheese and fruit sent to Germany. We had to give up all our copper, brass, tin and leaden articles, such as kettles, birds' cages, sets of teathings, etc. They wanted them to make guns and other war-materials, but the harvest was very small. We hid them in secret places, under the floor, buried them in the earth rather than giving them to help the Germans to win the war.

Then came the measures against the Jews. At first they were compelled to wear a David star, were forbidden to enter cafes, hotels, public parks and theaters. They could not have a telephone, had to give up their business, their money and at last all of them were kept prisoner, sent to concentration-camps, at first in the Netherlands, later on in Germany, where they suffered much, were tortured, mothers separated from their children, wives separated from their husbands, finally starved, to death, shot, hanged, drowned, burnt or buried alive. About 200.000 Dutch Jews died in this way.

When the Jews were taken prisoner in Amsterdam, where most of them lived, the whole town struck work to show their sympathy with the victims and their indignation about these cruel deeds, but it was no use. Only some of them could be rescued by the illegal organisations, hidden in a secret room, on a loft, even under the roof of a church. But most Jews were cowards and could not be trusted - it was a Jewess who betrayed father.

Matters grew worse and worse. In the month of May 1943 the Germans took severe measures to break our people's strength. In the first place they ordered that everybody who had been in the army under forty had to be registered. Their purpose was obvious. When they knew their names and addresses they could take them prisoner at any moment when they liked. We had but one answer and one means to answer: strike. And we struck work. Especially in the country everybody refused to work any longer. The farmers refused to give their milk to the milk-factory, because the butter and cheese made from it were sent to Germany and our rations were very small. The roads were broken up to prevent the motor-cars from taking milk to the factories. On the other side of the river Merwede a house of a national-socialist was set fire to and chauffeurs who tried to transport milk to the factories, were attacked and their milk poured out on the road. People from the towns could freely fetch milk in the villages as much as they liked. The shipbuilding-yards and steelworks lay down work. At Gorinchem the staff of the Post-and Telephone-office struck work, so that for a whole day the telephone-communication with the other districts was interrupted.

The Germans were furious and oppressed this strike with a strong hand. They shot the strikers without mercy and all over the country one could read placards with a list of heroes that had been killed. After some days people set to work again. The result of this strike was that only the staff professional officers were kept prisoner and sent to a concentration camp in Poland.

But this was not all the Germans intended. A new attack came very soon. They wanted workmen for their factories to produce guns and all that is necessary to wage a modern war. Their own sons served as soldiers in their armies and died in the plains of Russia. That's why the boys from the occupied countries had to work in their factories. At first they tried to "comb out" the businesses, but that was not sufficient. They wanted men on a large scale. A new law was made that every boy from eighteen to twenty-five had to be registered at the employment-bureau. Severe punishment would follow when they did not do that. They had to take with them their distribution-cards, which ^{were} stamped. In the future were ordered not to give tickets to persons of this age who had no mark on their cards. Thus they tried to starve the youth of Holland out. The Germans promised that there was a great chance to receive an "Ausweis" and it would be possible to remain in Holland, but this was a trap. When the registration was complete they announced that the boys born in '24 and '23 without any exception and those born in '24 with the exception of agriculture and horticulture had to work in Germany. Many boys had presented themselves at the employment-bureau and now their remained one choice: either going to Germany or "diving under water"- a special term for our wet country, i.e. going to another village, where nobody knew them to work on a farm or something like that. Of course, in this state, there came lots of work for the illegal organisations.

In the first ~~the~~ place they had to help the persons who had not gone to the labour bureau and now could not get tickets in a legal way. It was easy, when the whole staff of the distribution-office was "safe"-could be trusted: the tickets were procured after closing-hour. But it was difficult when this was not the case. Moreover there were labourers who had gone to Germany and came back on furlough, but wished to stay in Holland and refused to work for the enemy any longer. These workmen had no ration-papers at all, because the labour-bureau had kept them.

Therefore the illegal organisations arranged attacks on distribution-offices. This was the work of the K.P.'s-Knokploegen-Battle-teams.

In broad daylight a motor-car appeared in front of the office, armed men jumped out of the car: "Hands up", the clerks could and would not

resist

were ^h put up in a cellar and all the distribution-papers were robbed and afterwards divided among the persons who wanted them. Sometimes the attack failed and death awaited the heroes. It became very dangerous when the Germans ordered that in every office an armed policeman must be on guard, but it often happened that this policeman also participated in the plot. The other boys who would not go to Germany wanted a hiding-place and a very intricate organisation all over the country was necessary to help every one. This organisation was called the L.O.

In all this work father took a very active part. He hid Jews, provided tickets for hidden persons and fugitives, etc.

Father was a postman and in this profession he could be very useful for the Dutch underground. Gorinchem is a centre for the whole district. There are many schools, shops, official buildings, barracks for soldiers and so during the war there were many German soldiers and at Gorinchem lived the "Ortskommandant", a high German officer who governed the whole region. It stands to reason that the letters for the "Ortskommandant" passed the post-office where father worked. It sometimes occurred that Dutch traitors wrote a letter to the "Ortskommandant" in which they mentioned names of persons who had to be taken prisoner, while they possessed a radio-set or worked for the underground. When father saw such suspect letters, he took them home, opened them and warned the betrayed. In this way he saved many lives.

And then there was the work of the underground press. The official press was poisoned under German influence and in every paper advertisements appeared which indeed ^{nrhka} the Dutch to enlist in the German army in Russia. As Holland needed a press that could be trusted and told the truth about the war, secret pamphlets appeared with poems and announcements. Secret papers were printed, at first on a very small scale and only once a week or once a fortnight, but this increased very rapidly and in the last stage of the war the illegal papers appeared daily and "Eax Loyalty" had an impression of 100,000 copies. Other papers were "The Free Netherlands", "Orange-paper", "Beat the drum", etc.

Father distributed many of these papers. This was a most important part of the illegal work. Our people learnt the truth about the war, was encouraged by them and knew that after all the Germans were not to win the war.

Moreover father collected arms of every kind to arm a group of partisans. They made gunpowder and explosives which were sent to Amsterdam where the group C.S.6 used them to blow up buildings and to kill dangerous persons. The traitors, however, did not sleep. The illegal group in Amsterdam came into contact with a Jewess. They trusted her and in the beginning they did good work, but soon she was taken prisoner, because she was a Jewess. A German officer fell in love with her and promised to free her, when she wanted to work for him. So she did and she betrayed the whole group C.S.6 to the Germans. The consequence ^{was} that they also found the track to Gorinchem.

On September 21th 1943 a German motor-car with S.S. men appeared before our house. Father had already smelt a rat and had fled to my brother-in-law's. It was no use, for they found out and the same day father was taken prisoner my brother-in-law too, only because he had hidden his father-in-law. This awful day a great many persons of the plot were taken prisoner. They were taken to Rotterdam. Traitors must have been at work, for the same day the Germans came to our house once more with father and they at once went to the fowl-house, where a box was buried in the ground with bullets and explosives. They found it without asking anything. Later on they found a gun, hidden under the coals in the cellar of the post-office and the letters, written to the "Ortskommandant", hidden in the chimney of a workshop. Father had preserved them to serve as a proof against the traitors after the war.

One of the men imprisoned had a key in his pocket of a store-house, where guns, machine-guns, revolvers and furniture of hidden Jews lay piled up. It could be expected that the Germans would ask for the purpose of this key. Therefore the men of the Gorinchem group who were still at large resolved to transport these goods to a safer place. That was a very difficult work. To do this in broad daylight was impossible. At night it was very dangerous, for in those days we were not allowed to walk in the streets at night. Fortunately one of the group was a Gorinchem policeman and with his aid the work began. A blacksmith helped to break open the door. In the meanwhile the rumour spread that the Germans had come back and were crossing the town. They hurried on. On their last journey they met a couple of soldiers, but fortunately they did not notice them in the dark. When early in the morning the Germans came they found the store-house nearly empty.

In Rotterdam the prisoners remained six weeks. Several times the Germans interrogated father and the others and it appeared that they knew everything about father's activities. There was no help denying and after much suffering father confessed. The Germans had evident proofs for his guiltiness.

After six weeks father and the others, 23 together, were transported from Rotterdam to the concentration camp at Vught, near 's-Hertogenbosch, in the North of Brabant. One of them was sentenced to death and shot in the month of November 1943, but the rest remained in the camp for several months without anything happening.

The prisoners could write a short letter every fortnight and we in our turn could answer this letter. Father worked in a factory in the camp, erected by Philips, where radio-sets and electric lamps were produced. My brother-in-law had to work on an air-field and had to repair it, whenever the Allied bombers had destroyed it.

The food was bad in the camp, some soup and a few slices of bread and butter, but fortunately we could send a parcel with victuals and everyday-needs once a week. It was sometimes very difficult to collect food, but we always managed to fill a box with butter, sugar, cheese, fish, meat, two loaves, tobacco, razor-blades, etc.

On Sunday the prisoners could go to the movies and look at the pictures representing the victories of the German armies. But father and many others preferred to hold a meeting in the open air in a lonely part of the camp and then a minister came, a fellow-prisoner, to hold a short sermon and to pray with them. Of course, they had to be very careful, for they would be severely punished, when it was discovered. Every religious meeting was strictly forbidden. Father had taken a New-Testament with him, but the guards found it and he had to give it up. He was very sorry for that, for he often read in his Bible and it comforted him much. He knew that he was safe in the hands of God the Almighty and that nothing could hurt him.

Sometimes there was a football-match in the camp on Sunday Holland-Belgium, for there were also Belgian prisoners.

Every day the names of the prisoners were called over and when there was some one missing they had to stand in rain and cold for hours, till the fugitive had been found. There was a hospital in the camp, but only those who were seriously ill could be nursed there, when they had a fever of at least 39 degrees C.

A terrible accident happened in the women's camp, for women and men were separated. In this camp there was a woman that was loved by the commander of the camp. To please ^{she told him} him that she had heard the other women say about him and then the women were punished, and though the women told her not to do so, she would not listen. They soaked her bed with water and at last they cut her head bald. She was so ashamed that she fled out of the camp, but the guards saw her and killed her. In revenge the commander of the camp shut up forty women in a narrow cell, where they stood bodies against bodies and could hardly breathe, for there was not any ventilation. They remained there for twenty-four hours and when at last they were relieved, it appeared that fourteen of them had died and several gone mad. One of the victims was a woman of the Gorinchem group.

In the month of June 1944 we were informed that soon the uncertainty would end and that the affair would be treated by the German Upper-Court (das Deutsche Obergericht). The first session took place on June 21st 1944 in a Roman-Catholic boarding-school for girls at Vught. Mother, one of father's brothers, my sister and I assisted this session. It was a torture. After nine months we saw father back surrounded by German soldiers.

The German judges interrogated father and cross-questioned him for more than an hour. There was an interpreter, a devilish girl, between the judges and the accused. The session was interrupted by an air-attack. The matter was very complicated, for twenty-three persons had participated in the plot. It appeared that these judges did not even know their own laws. They thought that a boy with a stamp on his ration-card need not go to Germany and it was just the opposite.

In the afternoon the public prosecutor claimed father's death. He accused him ^{with} sabotage, founding an Anti-German organisation, possessing arms and gun-powder stealing the letters to the "Ortskommandant", distributing illegal papers, etc. The indictment implied eight points. As for the others, the public prosecutor asked imprisonment or penal servitude, varying from eight ^{months} to fifteen years. How silent father had been! If the Germans had known everything of the others! At last the session was adjourned till July 11th.

You may understand how sad we were and how fervently we prayed God to rescue father!

In the morning of July 11th the lawyers pleaded. A Gorinchem lawyer defended father magnificently and our hope revived.

The judges deliberated long and after an hour's unbearable waiting they appeared and announced that father was sentenced to death. Then we could talk with him for a quarter of an hour and take leave of him for ever. At last we saw him disappear in a car and he was taken back to the camp. Here he was imprisoned in a cell with two communists. It was very difficult for father to pass his last days with men who did not believe in God and eternity.

A time of terrible waiting for us began and every day we expected the horrible news in the papers that the death-warrant had been executed. We had asked for pardon and still hoped and still hoped, but on August 10th the papers told that father was dead. The next Sunday in church we sang Psalm 68: 10: Praise unto God with deep respect. It was father's wish. Many persons came to condole with us on our loss and to comfort us, but on August 30 a letter arrived written by father some hours before his execution and dated . . . August 25th, a letter commencing: When you receive this letter I ^{shall} be with our Lord Jesus Christ in Heaven and all your efforts will have been in vain.

What an awful idea it was that we had believed father to be dead, while he ^{was} still alive and that we had stopped to pray for him, while he needed it.

Some time after we got an official statement that father had died at Utrecht in the morning of August 25th. - In September the Allied troops crossed our frontier and freed the southern and eastern part of our country -.

In the month of October we got back father's clothes, except a new suit he had worn, his wedding-ring, shoes, etc.

After the liberation we made investigations to know more about father's death and his last days and where his body had been buried. At first we only learnt that on August 23th the Germans had taken father from Vught to Utrecht and executed him on August 25th, but that was all. Later on the Government's Service for Tracing and Identification of war-victims discovered three urns at Nijmegen. From the papers it appeared that they contained the material rests of father ~~and~~ and of the two communists. There was no doubt ~~about that~~. They had been shot

about that. They had been shot exactly at the same minute and their letters of farewell had been torn from the same note-book. But we did not know which of the two urns contained father's ashes and which those of the two communists. So it was resolved that all three would be buried in the same coffin on the Honour-Cemetery "Rusthof" at Amersfoort among their comrades and American and English pilots and Russian prisoners of war. In the month of July 1946 a solemn funeral-service took place at Amersfoort and father was buried in peaceful surroundings. A simple white cross stands on his grave bearing his name and dates of birth and death and the inscription: Psalm 68: 10 (Rhymed).