

Aanspraak

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Suddenly we were refugees with nowhere to go

Lydia and Annie Aldewereld's flight from the Nazis took them to the Dutch East Indies

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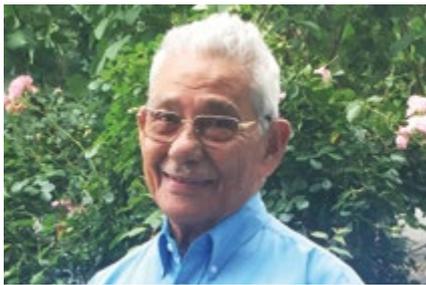
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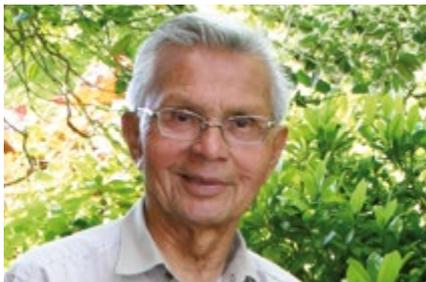
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Translation: SVB, Amstelveen.



Speaking for your benefit

Increasingly, commemoration ceremonies tend to focus on passing stories on to the younger generations. This year, for the first time during the Remembrance Day Ceremony on Amsterdam's Dam Square, the young people who laid a wreath at the cenotaph told us who it was for and what had happened to that person during the war. At the National Indies Commemoration for the victims of World War II in South-East Asia on 15 August, one young speaker spoke about how the war was linked to the world today.

Most people's knowledge of what happened during the war in the Dutch East Indies is limited. I, too, have only recently started to understand just how horrifying it was. Survivors of the war in the Dutch East Indies are currently our largest client group, so it is their stories that we hear most at client meetings. From the personal accounts in our client files, I have been struck by the appalling things they suffered in and outside the camps or while they were on the run.

Many of the survivors could not, and unfortunately still cannot, talk about what happened to them. This has been called 'the big silence'. It is understandable that so much suffering should be repressed; it is a common form of self-protection. But it is a pity, especially for their descendants, that such an important part of their family history has gone untold.

It is even more to be regretted now that, after more than 70 years, interest in the Second World War is growing among the younger generations. This is important, not only because so many survivors and their direct descendants are still alive and deserving of respect, but also because, for the younger generations, WW II is part of history and offers a framework for our present-day norms and values. As always, because it must not be forgotten and it must never be allowed to happen again.

A friend of mine recently told me that his mother never talked about the war until her grandchildren started asking her about it. This must have been very difficult for her, although something of a release too, I hope, and certainly very valuable for her grandchildren. Information can always be gained from films and books, but the impact of personal stories is so much greater. Let us share these stories wherever possible so that we can pass our history on to the generations to come.

Dineke Mulock Houwer
Chair of the Pension and Benefit Board



Suddenly we were refugees with nowhere to go

Lydia and Annie Aldewereld's flight from the Nazis took them to the Dutch East Indies

The Dutch-Jewish Aldewereld sisters from Brussels recount how they fled to the Dutch East Indies to escape the Nazis. Annie (88) kept everything relating to the war and Lydia (85) wrote about it.

In May 1940, Annie and Lydia Aldewereld fled from Brussels with their parents to get away from the Nazis. The family travelled on transit visas through France and then on through Spain, Portugal and Mozambique to South Africa, where as 'poor' Jewish refugees, they were refused a residence permit. Finally, they reached the Dutch East Indies a month before the war broke out with Japan. The sisters survived five Japanese internment camps.

Does the current refugee crisis remind you of the time you had to flee?

Annie: Seeing the refugees on television now is a stark reminder of the time we were running from the Nazis. Suddenly, as refugees, we weren't welcome anywhere. France was terribly anti-Semitic and we were often called 'sales Juifs', dirty Jews. We couldn't understand it. At home, we followed some of the more typical Dutch-Jewish traditions, but we weren't very religious.

Lydia: I recently thought about taking in some refugee girls from Syria, but the Belgian government wants to keep control over the situation itself, so they've blocked all private initiatives.

What was it that prompted you to leave?

Lydia: My father, Simon Aldewereld, was in danger as soon as the Germans invaded our country in 1940. Since 1932, he had been the general manager and publisher of the Dutch weekly 'Het Hollands Weekblad' in Brussels, which quickly became a broad political-cultural weekly, read by Dutch subscribers in other European countries, Australia and Africa.

It had a strong reputation for being anti-fascist, so my father would certainly have been arrested.

Annie: Our childhood before the war was very carefree. I was born in Rotterdam in 1928 and Lydia in Voorburg in 1931. We moved to Brussels in 1932 and went to the Dutch primary school. When the war started, I was almost 12 and Lydia was almost 9. We moved first to De Panne on the coast, and then on my 12th birthday, 17 May 1940, we fled on foot to France. We worked our way southwards, sometimes on foot, sometimes by train or by bus. We slept at hotels and farmhouses, reception centres, convents and refugee camps, usually with our clothes on and suitcases at the ready so that we could leave again quickly if necessary.

Where did you and your family go?

Lydia: My father queued for days outside consulate buildings in Biarritz. There were hundreds of refugees waiting at the quayside to catch a boat to England. When we heard that there was only room on board for my father, my mother and sister cried. We decided to go on to Pau, but the town had run out of food and places to sleep. My father didn't want to risk travelling by train anymore or sleeping in reception centres, as we'd heard rumours that foreigners were being sent from the centres back to Germany.

Annie: We travelled through Toulouse to a large country house called Le Chateau in the village of Lafourquette, a haven for Belgian and Dutch refugees where the food and accommodation was free. My father was appointed as Head of Le Chateau, which meant the family was given a room which served as an office during the day. But my sister and I had to face the envy of the other refugees. With several families to a room, tensions rose and if there was anything they didn't dare say to my father, they took it out on us.

Lydia: We stayed in Le Chateau for nearly a year, waiting for transit visas so we could leave France. Our sole aim was to stay out of the hands of the Germans. Finally, we were able to leave for Portugal via Madrid. In Portugal, we were sent on, so we went by boat to Mozambique. As refugees, we weren't allowed to disembark anywhere. We were sent on again from Mozambique, travelling by train to South Africa. As poor Jewish refugees, we couldn't get a residence permit there either. We were forced by the authorities to board a ship for the Dutch East Indies, where we arrived exactly one month before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

What was it like arriving in the Dutch East Indies?

Annie: We were taken straight from the boat to a reception camp outside Batavia, where they checked to see whether any of us might be fifth column or traitors. After the obligatory interrogation, my parents were taken in by a host family in Batavia and we were lodged with a family that ran a Berlitz language school. After a while, we were sent to a private school high up in the hills. When the Japanese invaded, there was a lot of unrest in our area. The manager of the tea plantation below us arranged with colleagues to have everyone from the school brought over to his villa. A few months later, my mother managed to get permission from the Japanese to pick us up and take us to Batavia.

Lydia: In 1942, we were interned with mother, first in the camp at Tjideng, and then at Grogol. When we arrived, there was no water and the barracks were filthy. The camp was designed to house a limited number of poor prisoners, but there were soon a great many more. All the inmates were transferred to Tjideng, which was our second stay in the camp. After that, they moved us to Tangerang, and then finally to Adek.

Annie: At the beginning, in the very first camp, mother and I were allowed to earn a bit extra by shopping for the camp residents at Warung Kita, a toko outside the camp. In all the camps, they would make us stand in the tropical sun for roll call or as a punishment. That's why my skin is now covered in liver spots. In the two last camps, Tangerang and Adek, my chores were to make coffins out of bamboo sticks and canes, and kill pigs, although only the Japanese got to eat the pork. I also looked after some of the other prisoners' children.

Did the Japanese distinguish between certain groups of prisoners?

Lydia: We belonged to the poor people who had been transferred from Tjideng to the barracks at Grogol camp in July 1943. The 'rich' people stayed in the camp with the houses. During our second stay at Tjideng, all 'Israelites', and women married to 'Israelites', were asked to come forward, and we were then taken to Tangerang. After that, everyone in Tangerang, Christian or Jewish, was transferred to the already full camp of Adek, where the Israelites were housed in separate 'Jewish' barracks until the end of the war. Adek was our fifth Japanese camp.

Annie: Some of the Jews were from Iraq. They were very religious, but they were strong characters and insisted on having a kitchen that was more suited to kosher cooking. They managed to negotiate this with the camp commander in Tangerang, which meant they could safely cook the food smuggled in at night over the bamboo fence in their kosher kitchen during the day.

Did you have any personal possessions in the camp?

Lydia: In Tangerang, the Rabbi's wife gave me a prayer book and used it to teach me Hebrew. When we moved from Tangerang to Adek, it was confiscated. That's when I stopped believing in God!

Annie: Mother had kept a platinum bracelet secretly hidden, but she had the courage to hand it over after the Japanese threatened punishment. As a reward for daring to admit what she'd done, the Japanese unexpectedly gave the women a ration of coffee and sugar 'in exchange'. Mother gave everyone in our barracks coffee on Sundays, but she kept the sugar for her children. She was always ready to help people, and she was well liked in all five camps.

What is it that you remember most often?

Annie: A full moon always reminds me of our second time in Tjideng, where the new camp commander was a murderous man called Sonei. He would punish us by making us stand at roll call for hours in the blazing sun without food or water. He was even crueler during the full moon. He could hit very hard and constantly abused the prisoners.

Lydia: I sometimes think of the three postcards we got from father, always undated. I also think of when mother was seriously ill in Grogol and transferred

temporarily to Tjideng for an operation. I also remember the revolting live worms that were always growing and crawling out of the holes in my body. And how scared we were of the rats in Tangerang, running back and forth along the railing above our heads and gnawing on our toes at night if they got the chance.

Annie: There was nothing to eat. The Japanese tried to starve us. Mother melted candles that tasted of vanilla pudding. In Tangerang, she pickled grass to make 'atjar tjampur'.

Lydia: Just before the liberation, I was so exhausted I lost the will to live. I was lying alone in a room in the infirmary, teetering on the edge of life and death.

What was the liberation like for you?

Annie: We didn't know about the Japanese capitulation on 15 August 1945 until much later. After we were freed, my friend Sonja Cohen and I went outside the camp every day in spite of the danger. One evening, Sonja didn't come back. The next morning, her body was found by the gates hacked to pieces and nailed onto a plank of wood.

Lydia: At night, we heard footsteps as the freedom fighters threw burning torches over the camp fence. General MacArthur got the Japanese Emperor Hirohito to call on the Imperial troops stationed in Java to protect us in the camps against the violence, which the vast majority of them did, obedient as ever to the Emperor.

How did you pick up your lives again after the war?

Annie: After the liberation in Adek, we read about the Japanese camps in a Dutch daily newspaper called 'Oranje', printed in Singapore. Suddenly, we saw father's name as editor in small letters at the bottom of the page. He was alive!

Lydia: Thanks to his skills as a journalist, the Dutch authorities had secured his release from his last POW camp, the infamous Singapore prison, so that he could publish the Oranje newspaper. He couldn't leave his post, so he arranged for us to be transferred from Batavia to Singapore! We flew there in a Dakota.

Annie: It was wonderful to see father again. In Singapore, we could enjoy our freedom to the full and spent most of the day eating.

Lydia: But I'd soon had enough of that. What I really wanted was to learn. Father understood and sent

us to our mother's sister, Aunt Marianne, in the Netherlands.

How was the journey to the Netherlands?

Annie: As Dutch repatriates from the Japanese camps, we were given winter clothing in a centre in Ataka, a village on the Suez canal. I still have the list of all the items they thought we would need. They even gave us pairs of braces. What on earth were we supposed to do with those? In the East Indies we had always gone barefoot. Lydia wasn't used to wearing heavy, closed shoes and, later, she would often walk through the streets of Amsterdam in her bare feet.

What kind of a reception did you get in the Netherlands?

Lydia: We arrived in the Netherlands in May 1946. After six weeks, I was given a room in a rest home in Hilversum.

Annie: I immediately got a job in a large fashion store in Amsterdam because I could speak French. I didn't want to think about the war. But I didn't throw away anything from the war, and Lydia wrote about it.

Lydia: Annie put everything behind her as soon as we left the camp and threw herself enthusiastically into her work. I tried to make up for six and a half years of missed education, and I'm not finished yet. I became a ballet dancer, a ballet teacher and choreographer, and then a writer and filmmaker. In my work, I try to show how enriching and meaningful it is to live in freedom.

Are you ever troubled by memories or nightmares?

Lydia: I have nightmares about being hungry and running from the Germans. I often dream that I'm standing between the barracks with an empty food bowl, or trying to escape from the Nazis. I think the time we spent running affected me more deeply than the camps. After the war, whenever something happened in the world, my mother would always ask my father, 'Is that bad for the Jews?' When she was in an old people's home, I once found her under the bed shouting, 'I've got my identity card, I'm okay!' She lived in fear until the day she died.

Annie: I often think of our great grandmother, who was blind. The Nazis stripped her naked, put her in a truck and drove her to the gas chamber. What must she have felt?

Do you commemorate the war together?

Annie: We used to organise 'kumpulans', gatherings for Japanese camp survivors in Belgium. But few of those friends are still alive. We hope that through this interview, someone will send us one of the Oranje newspapers from Singapore, even if it's only a photocopy!

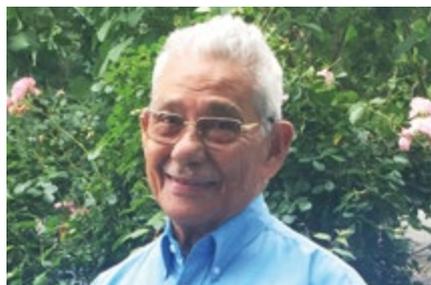
Lydia: If we forget the genocide, it would be like killing those who were murdered all over again. I use the word genocide deliberately - the murder of a whole people - to describe the extermination of the Jews and the Roma and Sinti. The words Holocaust, which means 'sacrifice' in Greek, and Shoah (catastrophe), are absolutely unacceptable to me.

Annie: Our closest Jewish relatives with the names Aldewereld, Vijevano, Bak, Knoop and Arbeid, died in the gas chambers at Auschwitz and Sobibor. My mother's sister, Aunt Marianne, was a widow who married a Christian just before the war. She still had to go into hiding, in spite of compulsory sterilisation, but she managed to survive the war. If we hadn't fled, we wouldn't have survived.

Interview: Ellen Lock

Under the name of Lydia Chagoll, Lydia wrote the following books: 'Buigen in Jappenkampen' (Bowing in Japanese camps), 'Hirohito, keizer van Japan, een vergeten oorlogsmisdadiger?' (Hirohito, Emperor of Japan, a forgotten war criminal?), 'Zigeuners. Sinti en Roma onder het hakenkruis.' (Gypsies. Sinti and Roma under the swastika), 'In naam van de Führer' (In the name of the Führer).

Her books and the DVD can be ordered from bcocdinfo@telenet.be



Caught between two cultures

They took my homeland from me and called it Indonesia

John Simons talks about the Dutch East Indies, where he was born, about how, as an Indo-Dutch boy, he was drafted to fight with the KNIL, about forced labour in the Japanese camps, and how he finally had to leave Dutch New Guinea in 1962 on a ship bound for the Netherlands.

Having left Indonesia against his will, he found himself caught between two cultures: 'I was deprived of my native East Indies by the Japanese occupying forces and Sukarno. After the capitulation of Japan in March 1942, I refused to sign the loyalty declaration to renounce Dutch authority and accept the Japanese regime.'

A scholarship

'On 2 April 1923, I was born into a Christian family in Bandjarnegara in Central Java, the second of four sons. Frederik - known as Fré, me, Bertus and Jules - whom we called Ventje ('little one'). Among ourselves, we spoke Dutch and a bit of Malaysian. We belonged to the group of Dutch citizens known as Indo-Europeans. As a child, I wanted to be a naval officer. I went to primary school and a school for lower professional education in Padang on the west coast of Sumatra, where my brothers and I lived in a series of boarding houses run by strangers for more than six and a half years. When I was fifteen, I was awarded a scholarship from the Indo-European Association to train as an engineer at the technical school in Bandung.'

Mobilisation

'After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, I had to report to the 1st Infantry Battalion of the KNIL. Although my studies exempted me from National Service, this didn't include general mobilisation. I rebelliously threw away the call-up letter because I wanted to continue my studies. The following day the police arrived on a motorbike and

sidecar to pick me up. I was far from being the only latecomer. The new recruits were transferred every other week. I ended up in recruitment company 1 of the KNIL 1st depot battalion on the tea plantation Tanara, south of Bandung.'

Prisoners of war

'After the KNIL capitulated on 8 March 1942 and the Dutch East Indies surrendered to the Japanese armed forces, my company was taken off to Djatinangor, a rubber plantation near the Tjiandjoer (Cianjur) resort in Bandung, where we lived in barracks made of plaited bamboo and wooden poles. There, I found my brother Bertus. We were given the chore of loading large sacks of rice and flour onto trucks. The sacks apparently came from food supplies that had been stored in Europe since 1940. The trucks drove off to their destinations through the camp. If one of the sacks fell off, we would use it to bake our own bread in ovens made from clay.

Bertus and I were virtually inseparable. After a month, they evacuated the camp and transferred us all in open trucks to the barracks of the 4th and neighbouring 9th Infantry Battalions at the larger camp of Tjimahi. Here, Bertus and I found our oldest brother, Fré, who was a sergeant living in the NCO quarters of the 9th Battalion. The regime soon became stricter. The camp commander had any soldiers who escaped and were returned to the camp by the local people executed, and the other prisoners were forced to watch. I deliberately stood at the back so I couldn't see anything. In September 1942, they took all the technicians and transported us in armoured train wagons to the 10th Battalion in Batavia. I had to leave my brothers behind. The Japanese commander of the 10th Battalion camp was a ruthless man called Sonei. We heard later that he had ruled the women's camp at Tjideng with an

iron fist. In the new camp, I volunteered to work in the infirmary. Together with other healthy volunteers, I kept everything clean, washed the patients and cleaned their wounds and rubbed them with cod liver oil.'

The transport to Japan

'After three months, we were transported by train to Surabaya, a journey of 12 hours in hot, armoured wagons. We then sailed on a former KPM (Royal Packet Company) cargo ship from Surabaya to Singapore, where we were housed in the former British barracks in Changi. I found my brother Bertus again among the prisoners. I learned later that he was sent from there to Burma, to work on the notorious railway. On 2 April 1943, we sailed from Singapore to the Japanese port of Moji on the southern island, where we arrived on 24 April. During the voyage, I had been so ill with dysentery that I was ready to give up. My friends managed to persuade me to eat the salt porridge and they held me up as I staggered down the gangplank. In Moji, I can only remember seeing cherry blossom. Three hundred prisoners, including the sick, were taken by train in armoured wagons to Nagasaki to work in the Mitsubishi shipyards. I was unconscious during the journey, so I don't remember it at all.'

Nagasaki, Fukuoka 14 camp

'Fukuoka 14 was situated near the station in Nagasaki and run by commander Shirabe. He was friendly. He welcomed us by saying that he hoped the war would be over for us soon and that all the prisoners would be able to return in good health to their families. He made sure we got rest, good food and housing. We were issued with Japanese uniforms including a warm coat against the winter cold. Each item of clothing bore the camp number, 259. Shirabe only gave permission for us to start work after all those who were ill had recovered. We walked for about an hour every day under military guard to and from the shipyard. There, we were under a naval guard and our work was supervised by civilians known as 'hantjou'. For every ten working days, we were given a day's rest. On our rest days, we had permission to visit the nearby cathedral of Urakami. In the shipyards, we worked in teams of cleaners, carriers, riveters, heater boys, drillers and reamers. Contact with the other workers, men

and women, Japanese, Chinese and Koreans, was tolerated, and they turned a blind eye to it. My hantjou could also speak Malay. After a while, we learned to understand and speak a bit of Japanese.'

Seriously ill

'In the summer of 1943, I was set to work on a nine-metre-high scaffold on the outside of a ship's hull so that I was continuously exposed to the cold sea wind. I got severe pneumonia and was treated by the Japanese camp doctor. By the end of August, I was back at the shipyard. In the summer and winter of 1942 and 1943, many of the prisoners died, mostly of pneumonia. But I still hoped for a good ending, 'Alles sal reg kom', as Pieter Maritz wrote. In June 1945, I was one of the hundred men transferred to Honami Branch Camp Fukuoka No. 22, near the city of Lizuka, to work in a coal mine. When part of the mine collapsed, I was buried under the coal and carried back to the camp unconscious. A few days later, I was sent to dig tunnels in the hills.

On 9 August, I saw the American bombers fly over. Lizuka is 124 kilometres north of Nagasaki, so I didn't notice anything when the atom bomb fell. It was the Japanese civilian guards who told us that Hiroshima and Nagasaki had been obliterated by bombs. On 10 August 1945, we stopped going to work.'

Liberated in Japan

'It wasn't until a few days later, during roll call, that the Japanese camp commander announced that the war was over. After the powers had been ceremoniously transferred and the prisoners officially liberated, I lost consciousness and woke to find myself lying on my back. One of the people sitting next to me, dabbing my face and wrists with cold cloths, was Japanese. When I was alone, I ripped up my diary, page by page, saying to myself, 'This is over. I will talk about the good things, but I refuse to remember the bad things', while the tears streamed down my cheeks. I realised that everything that had happened to us during those years could be blamed on the arrogance of our government leaders, who had caused us so much suffering after the attack on Pearl Harbor by declaring war on Japan despite its superior military strength. After that, I left the camp and was apparently found wandering about aimlessly. The people I spoke to couldn't understand what I was saying, so they took

me back to the camp. After a good night's rest, I was myself again. The highest-ranking person in the camp was an American, who had taken over the leadership from the Japanese commander. On a hill outside the camp, we painted a huge white cross for the American pilots who came to drop food and uniforms. In a victorious daze, we visited Japanese villages by train. At the end of August, we traded the superfluous tinned food dropped by the Americans for fresh Japanese products. In September 1945, we were evacuated via the devastated city of Nagasaki. The windows of the vehicles were covered. Officially, we weren't allowed to see anything.'

A letter from my mother

'An American aircraft carrier took us to Manila, where we were reinstated as KNIL soldiers. I learned from the Red Cross that my mother had been moved from the women's camp at Bangkinang on the west coast of Sumatra to Medan on the east coast. She sent me a letter to say that my father had died in Bangkinang camp on 26 March 1945. She said he had worked with the Resistance in Sumatra, gathering information about where the Japanese were located. He was caught and imprisoned in Padang with my youngest brother, Ventje. Mother wrote, 'Leave revenge to God.' At the end of September 1945, I was taken to Singapore and assigned to the military police to guard the reception camps for the women and children evacuated from Indonesia.'

Reunited with Fré in Medan

'In February 1946, I asked for leave to go to the British-occupied city of Medan see my mother, but I found my brother Fré there instead. I jumped through an open window into his arms. He was working for the British department for the investigation of war criminals. Through his intervention, I didn't have to go back to Singapore and requested a transfer to Medan. I was given permission to work in the British protected area as a driver for the command troops of what later became the Z-Brigade under general Scholten on North Sumatra. In May 1946, I was posted to the 3-3 RI, 7th December Division of the Royal Army (Koninklijke Landmacht, KL) as an adviser for the tropics. As advisers, we were able to prevent KL carrying out revenge actions when KL-soldiers were killed by armed Indonesian citizens during their patrols.'

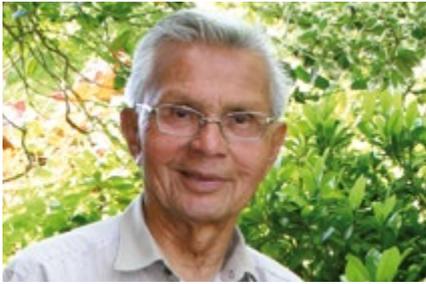
Farewell to my native country

'Seeing my mother and Ventje again for the first time during one of my fortnightly leaves in Batavia in January 1947 was incredible. In June 1947, I was demobilised but carried on working as a personnel manager for the army and the Negara Sumatera Timur intelligence service until 20 December 1949. The Negara Sumatera Timur was a people's army for the province of East Coast Sumatra in the newly emerging Republic of Indonesia. At the end of December, I left for Dutch New Guinea. The government had encouraged its Indo-Dutch citizens to believe that their future there would be secure because New Guinea would remain Dutch territory. In 1953, I travelled to the Netherlands for the first time and was admitted to the Engineering School in Amsterdam. From July 1954 to 1962, I worked as manager for the electricity net in Iifar, and as a hotel manager in Biak.

Sukarno got his way over the annexation of New Guinea, and in April 1962 I was evacuated with my family to the Netherlands for safety reasons. On 7 October 1962, I left new Guinea for good and moved to the Netherlands permanently. I did this against my will because I loved the country where I was born. In the Netherlands, I was regarded as Indonesian, and in Indonesia I was too Dutch, a 'belanda'.

In 1984, my brothers and I visited my father's grave in the military cemetery of Leuwigadja, near Cimahi. My oldest brother, Fré, died in 2009 and his widow and children had his ashes buried in father's grave. Ventje died in 1994. That only leaves me and Bertus, but he lives in Spain and is now seriously ill. In March 2016, I was awarded a Backpay payment of 25,000 euros, because I worked for the KNIL and didn't receive any salary during the war. This means that I will be able to visit Bertus again in the autumn.'

Interview: Ellen Lock



I never saw them again

Henk Kleijn survived the Battle of the Java Sea and witnessed the atomic bomb on Nagasaki

During his naval training, Henk Kleijn survived the Battle of the Java Sea. Then, as a Japanese prisoner of war, he witnessed the atom bomb fall on Nagasaki on 9 August 1945. Working at a Japanese shipyard six kilometres away, he watched as the city was wiped out in an instant.

On 13 September 2015, Henk Kleijn returned to that same spot in Japan with his family. As a survivor of Fukuoka No. 2 Camp, he was a guest at the unveiling of a memorial erected by the people of Nagasaki in honour of the camp's war victims.

My childhood friends

'My father came from Monnickendam and went to the Dutch East Indies seeking adventure. He was a musician and a choirmaster with the rank of sergeant with the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL). My Sundanese mother came from Sumedang on West Java. My parents had two daughters, Elisabeth and Frederika, and two sons. My brother Frederik died a few months after he was born. I was the youngest, born in Bandung on 27 October 1924. My mother died just seven months later. It was my father's second wife, who was also Sundanese, whom I called 'mother'. We lived on the Pangaranweg, the same street as my Sundanese childhood friend Dado and his sister Tjintawati. Dado and I were inseparable but after we left Bandung, I never saw them again. We moved to Meester Cornelis, a suburb of Batavia. After primary school in Bandung, I did a course in electrical engineering in Batavia.'

'Join the Navy!'

'Because of the threat of war with Japan, the city was covered in posters urging us to 'Join the Navy!', and it was in all the newspapers and on the radio too. As young men in the Dutch East Indies, we really did think, 'We're joining the navy to free the Netherlands from the Germans!' In August 1941,

when I was nearly seventeen, I volunteered for the Navy. I got my first military training at the Naval Barracks in Gubeng. After that, I continued my professional training on HNLMS Surabaya, which had previously been the armoured warship HNLMS De Zeven Provinciën. After we were mobilised, I couldn't contact my family at all. We were constantly on patrol along the East Indian Archipelago. On 27 February 1942, I was ordered to cast off the mooring lines for the cruiser HNLMS De Ruyter in the port of Surabaya. From the quayside, I could see Rear Admiral Karel Doorman standing on the bridge as his fleet set sail for the Battle of the Java Sea. Some of my school friends who had joined up just a few months before were also on board, on their way to a battle that ended in complete disaster. Most of them I never saw again.'

Caught

'After the Battle of the Java Sea, Naval Command decided to divert its crews to Australia. On 1 March 1942, we left for Tjilatjap on Central Java where the next day we boarded the SS Duymaer van Twist, a ship belonging to the Royal Packet Company. In the late afternoon, we set sail for Australia. In the early morning of 4 March 1942, we were detected by a Japanese reconnaissance plane that started circling above us. It wasn't long before the Japanese war fleet had approached and surrounded us. Our officers ordered us to throw our weapons into the sea. In the port of Makassar on Celebes, we were taken away as prisoners of war and locked up. We feared the worst as we had all heard stories about murderous and marauding Japanese soldiers in China.'

Makassar prison

'In the prison in Makassar, we were crammed into tiny cells together with a few half-drowned sailors who had survived the Battle of the Java Sea. We

were fed like animals. There was nothing to eat with; we had to catch the hot rice and drinking water in our hands. Some of the POWs were English and American. It was impossible to sleep because we were squashed together with our knees pulled up. During the day, we were set to work in the port. I had to paint the window frames of houses that had been confiscated. After a few weeks, we were transferred to an old KNIL barracks where we had to clear debris and renovate houses for the Japanese. It was impossible to escape and whoever tried it was beheaded. After six months, they picked out about eight hundred Dutch, British and American prisoners of war to send to Japan on the Japanese passenger ship, the Asama Maru. We sailed under the Japanese flag, so there was a risk of being torpedoed by the Americans or the British. We were only allowed on deck for a quarter of an hour. The rest of the time we sat crammed together in the hold. In the laundry room, two large chests of komodo dragons, the largest species of lizard and destined for a zoo, kept sliding backwards and forwards next to me. The lizards were fed five hens a day and they stank to high heaven.'

A feast upon arrival

'On 23 October 1942, after ten days at sea, we arrived in our flimsy tropical clothes at the port of Nagasaki where it was as cold as winter. On a square near the harbour, we were given a speech saying that from now on we would have to work hard for Japan. We were then taken in a small landing craft to the Fukuoka No. 2 prisoner of war camp on an island in Nagasaki bay. As soon as we landed, we were surrounded by Japanese guards yelling and beating us with large sticks. It was like that for the rest of the war. Everywhere we went, we would be beaten at the smallest excuse. All prisoners of war had their heads shaved on arrival and were assigned a bed in a wooden hut. There was a kindly Japanese camp commander named Shirabe who had them prepare a feast for us but he was soon replaced by someone much stricter. We worked under heavy guard on the docks of the Kawanami shipyard. I worked as a riveter, hammering iron rivets into the sides of ships. We worked in teams of four: the riveter, the holder-up, the catch boy and the heater boy. I did all of these jobs in turn. The riveter was the head of the team, which meant he got the stick if something

went wrong. We ended up sabotaging the work whenever we could. We worked from 6 in the morning to 5 in the evening. Once I got a burning splinter from a rivet in my left eye. It was ages before the inflammation had gone but I wasn't allowed to stop working.'

Surviving

'Some of the people who worked in the shipyard were Japanese. Sometimes they smuggled us a bit extra to eat. On Sundays, there were often cabaret shows organised by fellow prisoners. But the most fun we had was when the launch of a ship went wrong and it crashed into another ship under the gaze of a group of high-ranking Japanese dignitaries. Many of the boys who worked with me died of infectious diseases caused by prolonged hard labour in the bitter cold on practically no food. What kept me going was the hope that I would see my family again. To survive, I ate ground up fish bones for extra calcium and the vegetable fat used to grease the ships. For three and a half years, I got the vitamins I needed from eating seaweed. Some English prisoners came to our dormitory to sing in exchange for a spoonful of rice for a sick friend. They sang, 'There's a long, long trail a-winding into the land of my dreams', but for me it's always the same dreadful images of the war that come to mind. Things often went wrong in the shipyard. Once, looking down from the dock, I saw a large steel plate that was being lifted by a crane, slip out of its chains and slice through the head of a Japanese guard. He was standing above us on the edge of the dock watching us as we worked. His face was totally shattered. One time I had a very narrow escape, too, as I was crawling through a gap in the wall of a ship that was about to be filled with a large steel plate. I got out just in time, but my mate Peters, who was right behind me, was caught by the falling plate and lost a leg.'

Witnessing the atom bomb on Nagasaki

'At two minutes past eleven on 9 August, the atom bomb fell on Nagasaki. I was working on the underside of a ship in a concrete shipyard six kilometres away on the far side of Nagasaki bay. Although I had seen the American bombers fly over and heard the alarm, I carried on working. There were so many alarms that we often ignored them.

Suddenly there was a blinding white light and the ground shuddered under my feet. Then there was a thundering crash and a rush of wind. Some English sailors shouted a warning, "Watch out, get back, get back!" They were pointing upwards and I heard the sound of breaking glass. The air pressure had forced out all the panes in the glass roof of the dock. I hid under the ship. Then it went dark and there was a deathly silence. When it was over, we all crawled out of our hiding places. The Japanese guards were screaming at each other in panic. Then they called us to the parade ground on the hill and we watched Nagasaki vanish in smoke and ash with an enormous mushroom-shaped cloud hanging over it – an unprecedented phenomenon that remained visible for a long time. The thick concrete walls of the dock had protected me from the radioactive fallout, although we didn't understand anything about that then. After the liberation, some of the sailors went to get a closer look at the area that had been wasted, and got a high dose of radiation as a result.'

The liberation of Fukuoka No.2 camp

'It was a very tense period because the guards had often warned us that if there was a US invasion, we would be killed. In the camp, the Dutch flag had always been draped over the coffin during cremations so I got very emotional when I saw it flying from the flagpole. It wasn't until a few days after the capitulation that the first food parcels were dropped. One of the planes flew too low and we saw it crash into the mountain behind the camp. We got so much food that I gave some to the Japanese family in the guard's house, but my English mate disapproved. I thought it absurd to let them go hungry; their little girls weren't to blame for anything. A couple of days after the bomb, Fukuoka No. 2 was liberated by Japanese-American troops who lived on Hawaii. It was strange to see these people who looked just like our captors as liberators. We were taken by American landing boats to the hospital ship 'Haven' for a medical examination. After that, we were taken to Okinawa on board an American aircraft carrier, which was wonderful. The food was very good and we were given shoes and clothing. We slept in field beds on deck. The nurses were beautiful and Navy Bands played swing music. When I visited the war museum in Nagasaki in 2015 after the commemoration ceremony, I saw what the

two atom bombs had actually done. The images in the photographs were terrible, but for us POWs the bombs symbolised liberation. In the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum, there was also a photo of the Christmas celebrations that a Christian camp commander let us hold in Fukuoka No. 2 in 1942. My mates and I are in the photo. A Japanese minister gave a speech and we sang English carols under a pine tree.'

Behind the demarcation lines

'Soon after Sukarno's declaration of independence, we were sent to patrol the Police Actions. We were caught up in a war again, but this time against the Indonesian freedom fighters. We arranged and checked the loading of supplies for all the ships along the coast. In my role as stoker 3rd class, I was the ammunition box carrier and I took prisoners and crew members to shore in a motor boat. My second mother was behind the demarcation lines and I never saw her again. My childhood friends Dado en Tjintawati were also behind the lines, perhaps even fighting for the other side. I still wish I could meet them again now, though. I found my youngest sister again in the port of Batavia. She told me that my father had died early in the war, during the mobilisation. In Surabaya, I spotted my brother-in-law fishing from a pier, and so I found my oldest sister again. They left for the Netherlands soon after. I arrived in the Netherlands on the HNLMS Batjan on 19 November 1947. I carried on working as stoker 3rd class for the Royal Navy in Den Helder. In 1948, when our ship was berthed in the port of Amsterdam, I met my future wife, Corry, in a sandwich shop run by her parents.'

Unveiling the Fukuoka No. 2 Memorial in Nagasaki

'I was invited by a Japanese commemoration organisation to attend the unveiling of the Fukuoka No. 2 Memorial and give one of the speeches. My granddaughter said, "If you want to go, I'll go with you!" In the end, the whole family went together. The stone house of the camp guards was still there. It was a strange feeling to be back again in the place where I had lived through the three worst years of my life. During the lunch following the ceremony, I met the son of Shirabe, our first camp commander. On 13 September 2015, the memorial in Nagasaki was unveiled in honour of all 1,500 allied prisoners of

war who were sent to Fukuoka No.2 in October 1942. We were forced to work in the shipyard and by the time we were evacuated on 13 September 1945, 73 of our fellow prisoners had died.

For the sake of the Japanese people who were present, I stressed in my speech that I trusted that they would not forget what happened during the war so that it would not be repeated in their own lives and work. During a second visit to Japan at the invitation of the Japanese ambassador, I spoke to students at a university. I said that they were not to blame, but that in case there were any future leaders of the country in the room, they should never forget the history of the war.'

Interview: Ellen Lock



Questions and answers

Two years ago, I took part in one of your customer satisfaction surveys. How often do you hold these surveys?

Our customer satisfaction surveys are carried out every two years and are essential to helping us maintain and improve our level of service. The next survey will be held towards the end of 2016. This time, it will include those who are only entitled to benefits under the General War Injuries Scheme for Indonesia (AOR). Potential respondents will receive a letter from an independent research agency inviting them to take part. Participation in the survey is voluntary and complete anonymity is guaranteed. The results will be published in the quarterly Aanspraak in the new year.

My eye complaints are linked to the persecution I suffered, but my claim to have the costs of my glasses reimbursed under the Wuv scheme has been rejected on the grounds that it was submitted late. Can you explain this to me?

When awarding reimbursements under the Wuv scheme, we have to abide by the stipulations of the 'Decree on the commencing date for allowances and reimbursements under the Wuv'. In the Decree, the commencing date for reimbursements is taken as the first day of the month in which the claim is submitted. In other words, the claim must be submitted before any costs have been incurred for the facility or service in question (in this case, your glasses). It is also advisable to wait for a decision awarding reimbursement before incurring any costs so that you are sure that your claim has been accepted. For example, there may be a limit to the amount that can be awarded as this is based on the cost of the least expensive facility or service that meets the necessary requirements. It is also possible

that what you need is already generally available free of charge, in which case the claim will be rejected. Of course, you may have been unable to submit your claim on time due to special circumstances, for example, you needed medical treatment that could not be postponed. Under the terms of the Decree, it is possible to make an exception in such circumstances. However, you should keep in mind that the commencement date for reimbursement cannot be any earlier than the 1 January of the year before the year in which the claim is submitted. These rules also apply to the Wubo scheme. In the case of extraordinary pensions under the Wbp scheme, claims must be submitted before the end of the year following the year in which the costs were incurred. Claims for reimbursements under the AOR scheme must be submitted before any costs are incurred.

Can I qualify for Backpay and what do I have to do to claim it?

You will find all the details you need about the Backpay scheme in this year's March and June editions of Aanspraak. The scheme provides for a one-off payment of 25,000 euros for persons still alive 70 years after Liberation, who were civil servants or KNIL soldiers in the service of the Dutch-East Indies government during the war, and who received little or no salary during those years. The heirs to such persons can only qualify for the payment if the person concerned died on or after 15 August 2015. An information leaflet and claim form can be downloaded from our website at www.svb.nl/wvo, or obtained from the Sociale Verzekeringsbank, V&O Department, Postbus 9575, 2300 RB Leiden, the Netherlands, telephone number +31 71 535688 88 E-mail: info.wvo@svb.nl or info@pur.nl