

Auschwitz never again

Remembering World War II and the Holocaust in The Netherlands



Presentation by Victor Scheffers, president of the Dutch Foundation Communicantes

Auschwitz, August 15, 2018

1. Introduction: The Netherlands and World War II in Europe and in Asia

On 10 May 1940, the Germans invaded the Netherlands. They came from the north, middle and south and they bombed Rotterdam to force the Dutch to surrender. The "Battle of The Netherlands" lasted only 5 days, until the surrender of the main Dutch forces on 14 May. The Netherlands was occupied for 5 years, until the German capitulation on 5 May 1945.



The Netherlands declared war on Japan on 8 December 1941, and the Dutch forces fought against the Japanese under the American-British-Dutch-Australian Command structure. In late February 1942, Japanese naval forces defeated the Allied fleet at the Java Sea while Japanese Army troops landed on Java. The Dutch ground forces were unable to stop the Japanese invasion and surrendered on 8 March 1942. With the capitulation of Japan on August 15, 1945, the war in the Pacific was over.



Every year, in the first week of May, The Netherlands commemorates the dead (4 May) and celebrates its liberation (5 May).

2. The Netherlands during the war

After the German invasion of the Netherlands in May 1940, a civil administration was installed under the *Allgemeine SS* (General Schutzstaffel) auspices. Arthur Seyss-Inquart was appointed *Reich Commissar*. He presided over a German administration that included many Austrian-born Nazis. They in turn supervised the Dutch civil service. This arrangement was to prove fateful for the Jews of the Netherlands.

During 1940, the German occupation authorities banned Jews from the civil service, from schools and universities, and required Jews to register the assets of their business enterprises.

In January 1941, the German authorities required all Jews to register themselves as Jews. A total of 159,806 persons registered, including 19,561 persons born of mixed marriages. The total included some 25,000 Jewish refugees from the German Reich. A Jewish council was established in February 1941, after orders from the German occupiers, to administrate the Jewish community. As of April 29, 1942, Jews were required to wear a yellow Star of David on their clothing.

The arrests of several hundred young Jews (sent to the Buchenwald and Mauthausen concentration camps) led to a general strike by Dutch workers on February 25, 1941, and a hardening of Nazi policy. The German authorities and their Dutch collaborators segregated Jews from the general Dutch population, and incarcerated 15,000 Jews in German-administered forced-labor camps. The Germans then ordered the concentration of Jews in Amsterdam and sent foreign and stateless Jews to the Westerbork camp in the northeast part of the country.



The history of this camp is a distressing story. In 1939, a year before the war, Westerbork camp was inaugurated as a Central Refugee Camp for Jews fleeing from Germany. The camp construction costs were charged to the Jewish community in The Netherlands. In 1942 it became a *Durchgangslager*, a temporary residence for Jews living in the Netherlands. 245 Sinti were also deported from here to concentration and extermination camps. Almost every week a train left for the east; a total of 93 transports.

Shortly after the war almost 900 Jewish prisoners were liberated, and the camp got another new function: internment camp for members of the *NSB*, the Dutch National Socialist Movement which remained the only legal political party in the Netherlands during most of the Second World War, and collaborators.

In the absence of housing, from the summer of 1950 former colonial members of the Dutch forces in Dutch East Indies who were forced to leave with their families the new independent

Republic of Indonesia, were housed in the former camp Westerbork. Today, Westerbork is a memorial center, with a museum, a documentation center and an educational programme. The last train left Westerbork for Auschwitz on 3 September, 1944. During the two years in which the transports took place, the Germans and their Dutch collaborators deported 107.000 Jews, mostly to Auschwitz and Sobibor, where they were murdered. Only 5.500 survived. In addition, 25.000-30.000 Jews went into hiding, assisted by the Dutch underground. Two-thirds of Dutch Jews in hiding managed to survive.



How is it possible that only 5.500 Jews survived? The geography of the Netherlands made escape difficult. The ruthless efficiency of the German administration and the willing cooperation of Dutch administrators and policemen doomed the Jews of the Netherlands. A very efficient policy of isolation and deportation eventually took them to the concentration and extermination camps. Less than 25 percent of Dutch Jewry survived the Holocaust, an unusually low percentage compared with other occupied countries in western Europe.

Anne Frank

One of the most famous victims of the Holocaust is Anne Frank, a Jewish girl, born in Germany on 12 June 1929. She fled from Germany with her family. They went into hiding in a house in Amsterdam due to the fear of the Nazis. From 1942 to 1944 Anne wrote her diary there, that was found after her deportation to the German concentration camp Bergen Belsen where she died in February or March 1945. The diary was published in 1947.



Anne Frank's book has been translated into many languages. Today, the *Achterhuis* (Secret Annex) in Amsterdam is a museum and a center of education.

Position of the Churches

Both the Catholic and the Protestant Churches warned against the threat of National Socialism after 1933. The members of the NSB, the National Socialist Movement, were denied communion by the Catholic Church from 1934 onwards. This decision was also maintained during the occupation years. The Reformed Church had declared in 1936 that National Socialism was incompatible with Protestant doctrine. From the beginning Archbishop De Jong of Utrecht was strongly opposed to National Socialism and Nazism.

In February 1942 the Catholic and Protestant churches sent for the first time a joint protest against the "violation of justice, mercy and freedom of faith" to the German administration. In 1943 the Dutch bishops came with an even clearer message and they said that "cooperation in acts of injustice is against conscience and not lawful."



Some vicars, pastors and parish priests suited the action to the word and, for example, during razzia's, opened their churches to people who wanted to escape persecution or forced labor.

Some catholic people, priests, religious and

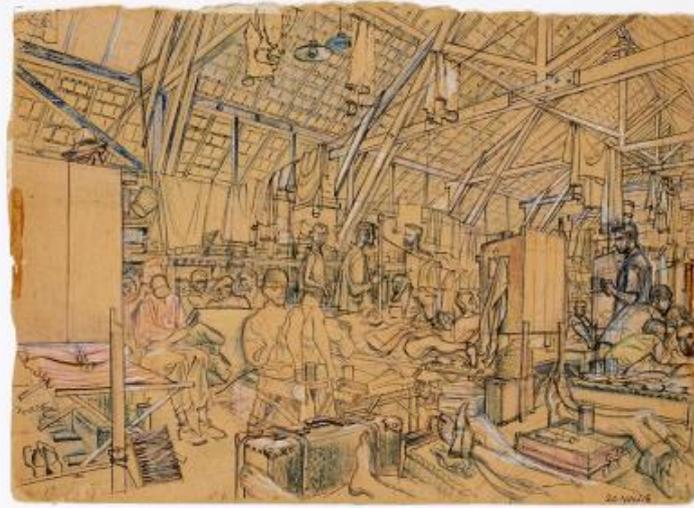
lay, have paid a high price. One of them was Edith Stein. In 1943 she fled from Nazi Germany and moved into a Carmelite convent in the South of The Netherlands. After the protests of the Dutch bishops against the persecution of the Jews, the occupying forces responded with reprisals against Catholic Jews. It was during these actions that Edith Stein, her sister Rose and others were arrested in the convent. They were deported to Auschwitz and murdered there on 9 August.

However, pastors and priests were not always anti-German. It was also preached that the government should be obeyed. This led to acceptance, adaptation and sometimes even to collaboration.

Pacific

While most colonial members of the Dutch forces in Dutch East Indies were released back into the population, more than 98.000 of both military and civilian Dutch were placed in prison camps; thousands of them were later deported to Japan, Thailand, Malaya, and Burma as forced laborer. After the Dutch defeat in 1942 in the then Dutch East Indies, 8.500 Dutch

prisoners of war were killed, while 4.000 of them drowned on Japanese troop transport vessels which were torpedoed by the allies.



I myself am the son of a Dutch officer who survived the war. When he was in military service in the late 1930s, my father opted for the Royal Dutch Indies Army, ignorant of the threat of war in the Pacific. In 1942 he was made prisoner of war, and transferred to Burma where he had to work on the notorious Burma Railway. Later he was transferred to Japan and forced to work in the Japanese war industry near Kyoto.

After the capitulation of Japan my father was liberated by the American troops. He had survived the war, but he never fully recovered from the hardships. He died in 1952, eighteen months after his return to the Netherlands, And he was not the only one. Years after the capitulation, the war still claimed victims.

3. To remember and commemorate

A national committee, *het Comité 4 en 5 mei* (the 4 and 5 May Committee), has as its most important tasks to give direction, content and form to commemorate and celebrate, and to keep alive the memory of the Second World War. It is responsible for the programme of the national commemoration day, but it also serves as a documentation center, it advises local communities and municipalities about the management and preservation of memorial sites, and it undertakes various activities to inform and educate young people about WWII, about racism and exclusion, and about contemporary armed conflicts.



National Commemoration Day

An estimated 250.000 Dutch citizens were killed during WWII. On 4 May during the Commemoration Day for the Dead, the Netherlands observes 2 minutes of silence to remember these victims and also all of the Dutch who have died since that time in other wars. The main wreath-laying ceremony takes place at the National Monument on Dam Square in Amsterdam, which is usually attended by the king and other royal family members,



government ministers, and military leaders. All over the country there are local commemoration events.

On 5 May, the liberation of the German occupation is celebrated, with freedom festivals everywhere in our country.

The Indian community from the former Dutch colony the Dutch East Indies, today's Indonesia, holds on 15 August as liberation day.

Although the Netherlands was liberated on 5 May 1945, the war ended in the former Dutch East Indies only on 15 August 1945, due to the capitulation of Japan. For the first time, 25 years later, an extensive commemoration of the end of the Second World War in Asia took place on 15 August 1970. This was the start of the annual commemoration which takes place at the monument for the victims of war in the Dutch Indies, in The Hague.



Auschwitz

57.000 people from The Netherlands, mainly Jews, have been transported to Auschwitz, in 68 trains. 28.000 have been sent to the gas chambers immediately, 19.000 have been registered. Only 900 survived.

Holocaust Memorial Day, 27 January, is a worldwide memorial day for the victims of the Holocaust and other genocides. The day was designated in 2005 by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in reference to the remembrance of the liberation of Nazi death camp Auschwitz on 27 January 1945. In The Netherlands, Holocaust Memorial Day is organized each year on the last Sunday of January; the commemoration is held at the Mirror Memorial 'Auschwitz never again', created by the artist and writer Jan Wolkers, located in Amsterdam.

This monument consists of 6 broken glass mirrors on top of ashes from Auschwitz, and a huge glass plate with the inscription: *Nooit meer Auschwitz*, Auschwitz never again.

In the school-year 2017-2018 this monument has been adopted by the Roman Catholic Primary School Saint Lidwina in Amsterdam.

There are more memorial sites in our country, to honor the victims of the Second World War.

I give you a few examples:



The women of Ravensbrück (Vrouwen van Ravensbrück)

In the Nazi concentration camp Ravensbrück in Germany, around 1000 Dutch women were imprisoned. Most of them had opposed the German occupation. They had helped Jews to find shelters, transported weapons for the resistance, helped escaped American and English pilots who had been shot, distributed resistance papers, falsified ID cards, etc.

Every year on 13 April the liberation of the concentration camp is commemorated at the monument. The monument "Women of Ravensbrück" in Amsterdam is dedicated to the 90.000 women and children and the 20.000 men who were murdered in concentration camp Ravensbrück



Dachau memorial

Every year at the end of April a commemoration will take place for the victims of the concentration camp Dachau at the National Dachau monument in Amsterdam, a sixty-meter-long street road of Belgian blue stone; 2.35 meters wide, with a high row of trees to the left and right. Like in Dachau itself. There are tall poplars along the *Lagerstrasse*.



Children of the Merkelbach School, who adopted the monument, stand with flowers at the beginning of the camp street. Everyone who enters there receives a flower and puts it in a random place in the hedges that form the boundary of the monument. After the Old Dachauers, relatives and guests will follow; all interested parties are also welcome by the monument.

Waalsdorpervlakte

The monument on the Waalsdorpervlakte in The Hague was erected in memory of the estimated 250 to 280 fellow citizens, including many resistance fighters, who were executed by the occupying forces in the dunes on the outskirts of the city during the Second World War. 215 of them came from the nearby prison in Scheveningen, nicknamed *Oranjehotel*. Orange is our national color.



Mass executions often have to do with reprisals of the occupier. On 8 March 1945, 38 men, including 27 resistance fighters, were executed on the Waalsdorpervlakte as a reprisal measure for the attack on the *Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer* Hanns Albin Rauter, two days earlier. On 6 March,

Rauter became involved in an action by a resistance group by mere coincidence. He survived the attack.

On 8 March 1945, all across The Netherlands, 263 persons were executed as revenge. Rauter, after being sentenced to death by a Special Court of Appeal, was executed himself on 25 March 1949 on the Waalsdorpervlakte.

War graves and heritage sites

Many of the war graves in The Netherlands can be found at special war cemeteries. In the Dutch fields of honor there are soldiers but often also civilians such as *Engelandvaarders* (men and women who managed to escape from occupied territory and intended to join the allied forces in England or other allied forces to actively participate in the fight against the enemy), resistance fighters and forced laborers. In addition, many allied soldiers who died here are buried in the Netherlands. T

There are also war cemeteries around the world with Dutch war graves. Most are in Southeast Asia, for example approximately 25.000 Dutch war graves on seven Dutch Heritage sites in Java, Indonesia. The Dutch honorary fields are managed by the War Graves Foundation.

German war cemetery Ysselsteyn (Duitse Oorlogsbegraafplaats Ysselsteyn)

The military cemetery (*Kriegsgräberstätte*), located in Ysselsteyn, in the province of Limburg close to the German border, is the only German soldier cemetery throughout The Netherlands. Here are 85 fallen soldiers from the First World War and 31.585 fallen from the Second World War. A cross is placed for every fallen soldier. The data (name, birth and death date, rank - if known) are applied to the stone. Approximately 5000 unknown soldiers have been buried here. These are buried with crosses with *Ein Deutscher Soldat* (a German soldier) on it. Next to the entrance there is now a *Jugendbegegnungsstätte* (a youth encounter center) for German youths aged 14, 15, 16, where they can stay overnight. They help with the maintenance of the graves, but the stay is primarily intended to confront them with the consequences of war. They discover that there are 1400 child soldiers in the cemetery. You notice that for them the war comes very close.



In addition to requests from German schools, more and more Dutch schools are also interested in visiting.

"Actually more than we can handle", according to the manager.

But to be honest, even today, so many years after the end of the Second World War, there are still protests from veterans and from an anti-fascist

movement, who have great difficulty with this cemetery and in particular with the annual wreath-laying on *Volkstrauertag*, the German national "people's day of mourning" in mid-November. They consider it inappropriate that SS'ers, members of the *Schutzstaffel*, who have been responsible for enforcing the racial policy of Nazi Germany, are also

commemorated. But from the point of view of German and Dutch authorities the ceremony is not intended to pay homage, but as a sad and peace-reminding commemoration of all victims of war and violence.

4. To conclude

78 years after the liberation there are hardly any people left who have experienced the war and the horrors of the concentration camps. There are not many people who can retell it.

On Monday 30 July of this year Mrs. Lotty Huffener-Veffer died in Amsterdam at the age of 97. She was one of the last survivors of Auschwitz.

Lotty was arrested in 1943 with the rest of her family and transported to transit camp Vught, in the southeast part of our country. Her sister and her parents were deported a short time later to camp Sobibór in Poland, in the so-called children's transports. Immediately after arrival they were gassed.



In 1944 Lotty was deported to Auschwitz. In early 1945, when the Russians advanced, she had to join the death march through the freezing cold. In April 1945 she was released.

Through Denmark and Sweden, Lotty returned to Amsterdam in August 1945. She had nothing and nobody left: her parents, her sister and her fiancé were murdered and

her old house had new residents. The first night she slept on a bench in the open air.

After the war she did a lot to keep the memory alive. In this way she ensured that the so-called Monument of the Lost Children was placed near transit camp Vught. On the memorial are the names of all 1.269 deported children. There the children's transports are commemorated every year. She also told her personal story in primary schools.

At the conclusion of this presentation, I want to honor Lotty, and all survivors of the Holocaust who had and still have the courage and power to tell their stories.

And we remember the victims. Even after so many years, it remains necessary to reflect on their suffering and their sacrifice. This is not only a duty of honor, but also a lasting message to future generations about the horrors which racism and discrimination may ultimately lead. Auschwitz never again.