

NAME: Jannetje

RANK: Civilian

ORGANIZATION: Not Applicable

OVERSEAS WARTIME LOCATION: The Netherlands

- The following excerpt is directly from an original wartime period letter written by Jannetje. This is the only letter from Jannetje in the site curator's possession.
- The following excerpt is presented under fair use provisions for educational purposes.
- No controversial material has been omitted from the following excerpt aside from an edited derogatory term for Germans for the protection of younger readers. No grammatical or spelling errors have been corrected.

Jannetje writes a cousin in the United States:

“Rotterdam, June 1st 1945.

After a five years' war I am writing to you for the first time...I am a teacher. In his last letter, your father told me to study English so as to be able to write to you in English, because you cannot read Dutch. Well he need not have told me so, for I studied English...Now I am giving lessons at home and at an Advanced Elementary School. I have 40 pupils there of some fourteen years of age. At present, I have rather many pupils at home, for everybody wants to learn a little English now! Only to be able to understand the Canadians! Well, I think this will do about myself. Of course, I expect you to give an account of your studies and work in your answer to this letter. Perhaps you are a married woman by now?! I am really very curious to know something more about you. It would be very pleasant to correspond regularly with you!

Now for our experiences during the war. 10 May 1940, very early in the morning, great numbers of those big, dark Heinkels fly over our town. Father and mother are looking at them at the door, but I refuse to do so; I understand, I feel that terrible truth: war has begun! The first days are terrible! The shops have no milk, hardly any bread and what is more: you dare not venture out of doors for the enemy planes are continually overhead! Then on the 14th of May the Germans bomb this town. It is an awful day! The centre of the town is utterly destroyed. Fortunately our quarter is not hit. We are very afraid, however! At seven o'clock in the evening, we hear the news that our burning town has surrendered. After that real war – life begins. Everything is rationed. The H _ ns appear. You cannot trust your neighbour any longer. People dare not say anything! The Germans our 'Liberators and protectors' as they called themselves, began to teach us their 'new order'. Fortunately they could not prevent ~~you~~ us from thinking whatever ~~you~~ we liked. The first three or four years of the war had each their fatal date on which many people were killed by bombs. Many bombs fell in our neighbourhood, but we were never hit. Once, our garden – doors flew open, as a bomb had fallen in a garden behind ours. There was much damage done to the houses of our street, but it could have been worse. The last great bombardment was on the 31st of March 1943. My school was at Schiedam. I had just arrived by tram when we heard the alarm and five minutes later a large parts of the town was ablaze. The fire raged at five, no perhaps three minutes distance from our house. If I ~~had~~ had come home somewhat later, I would have been in the tram that was destroyed. The last years there was less air activity i.e. the Germans let the allied machines by almost without shooting at them and we had no more bombardments. Yet, how glad we were when the invasion

began. D-day gave us hope and our spirits rose as the allied forces advanced. I had told my parents that I hoped to see the English soldiers in our town before the end of the holidays. But ... September came. Not a single allied soldier was to be seen. The first schoolday went by. The next morning, on my way to school I heard incredible rumours. The English were fighting near Breda and marched up to Moerdyk, by one o'clock they would be here! I did not believe it, but hardly was I at school when I was sent home; the police had said that the roads must be free! The streets were gay to look at. Everywhere people stood talking. The Germans rushed to and fro. Everyone was nervous and full of expectation. Everything in town was at sixes and sevens. This day is now called 'Dolle Dinsdag' ('Mad Tuesday'). You will understand that we were very disappointed to find that we had believed 'rumours'. In fact, ~~when~~ if some hundred soldiers had made their appearance, the town would have surrendered, I think. From this day our rations began to go down. There was no fuel. During the whole winter we got two units (+ 120 kg) of coke. From the beginning of November we got no gas or electricity, so we had to cook our scanty food on the stove; besides the winter was a very cold one! In November I went to school only four days a week (there was so little coal!) and at the end of that month only two, because I had to walk because the tram did not go any longer and my school is at a two hours' distance from my house. On the 18th of December we were sent home for good. The coal had to be saved for the Germans. In the month of January the cold was at its worst. You could not work, neither do nothing, the ice did not melt on the window – panes for a whole fortnight and outside everything was covered with snow. We went to bed at six o'clock in the evening and got up at half past nine in the morning. Those nights were horrible! On the eighteenth of February father came home dead – tired, he could not even take off his coat and would not eat, something incredible, for he was always very hungry, as we all were. That night he was very ill and the next morning he looked like a skeleton. He had been thin, but now you were afraid to look at him. He was suffering from malnutrition and no wonder! Our rations were: 400 grams of bread, 1 kg of potatoes a week and an additional 3 kg of beetroots in two or three weeks' time, but they were not always to be had in the shops. Father was laid up some six weeks, then he could sit up a little and gradually he tried to walk a little longer through the rooms. Mother and I were also very thin, but we were not yet ill. Father weighed still too much (46 kg!!) to get extra – food. You will be able to understand that we were very glad to hear that the allies had crossed the Rhine, but you cannot imagine our joy at hearing that Friday – night: Holland has surrendered, we are free! We heard it at nine o'clock in the evening, we were already in bed, but we heard people crying out in the street. It was too good to believe! The next morning, we read it on the shops, on the walls; everywhere posters had been sticked! It was really true. The flags did not appear until Sunday, but at eight in the morning the church-bells rang! Everywhere was sun, joy, enthusiasm! But the joy was complete when victory – day arrived, the liberation of Europe was finished! The feast, if we can call it like that, for it consisted only of flags, long walks and fine weather, for there was nothing else to feast with, lasted a fortnight. Then everything became more normal and what is more, our rations were gradually increased. On the 28th of May I had to go to school for the first time. The following day, however, the doctor told me to keep quiet as I had an underweight of 30%. So, I again stayed at home for a month. Last week, I began. I had come on 7 kg! We are very grateful that our rations are so much better now. You don't know what hunger is if you haven't ~~suffered~~ gone hungry yourself! And so many people were indeed starved to death by the German hunger – system. At last we have got rid of them! The dead had to wait 10 days to be buried! They had no coffin of their own. One coffin was used for one corps after another and people were buried in an immense paper bag, later on they were thrown into a chalk – pit!

Well, my dear cousin, I hope I have satisfied you with this letter. I hope you will be so kind as to answer me at your earliest convenience. Many kind regards to your parents, your sister and especially to you,

Yours affectionately
Jannetje”

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- Jannetje made it through the Second World War but when she passed away is unknown.

- For visual context, this link connects to an original wartime period newsreel in the public domain that partially covers the above time period and the Netherlands (viewer discretion advised): https://archive.org/details/1940-05-13_Washington_DC
- For additional detail, these links connect to the Wikipedia pages that refer to the German and Allied bombing of Rotterdam which Jannetje mentions in her letter (reader discretion advised):
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rotterdam_Blitz
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allied_bombing_of_Rotterdam