

The Context

2.1. The whisper of freedom

Allied airplanes, flying in large numbers over The Netherlands and carrying deadly loads of bombs destined for Germany, were a visual reminder that the war against Germany was still being waged. The airplanes flying overhead were often seen as a forewarning of an impending invasion that had to begin sometime and of an approaching Allied front that could advance once the invasion had taken place.¹

People's expectations were running high and nerves were strained. Thus, on 10 October 1943, when the loud clatter of an air battle being fought in the skies over the Dutch Calvinist Church in Holten interrupted the Sunday service, the church-goers felt restless. The vicar, who was probably also finding it difficult to stifle his curiosity, asked one of the parishioners sitting near the door to investigate what was going on outside. The church-goer returned shouting: "Preacher, the entire sky is full of parachutes." Immediately a rumor spread throughout the church that the long-awaited invasion had begun, and in the blink of an eye the entire church was empty.²

The drone and hum of airplane engines overhead sounded like music to the ears of the expectant Dutch living in occupied territory.³ Numerous songs and lines of text were composed to express the feeling of this experience.

A hymn, who can name one
as sweet, that causes us fright
like the thousand-fold hum
of Tommy planes in their flight?

"Maar wie kan een hymne noemen
even lieflijk en geducht
als het duizendvoudig zoemen
van de Tommies in de lucht?"

Where in the world sound choirs
more celestial, and grand,
than the Allied fliers
setting course towards Kraut homeland?

"Waar ter wereld klinken koren
schoner dan de aria
die de R.A.F. doet horen
op haar weg naar Moffrika?"⁴

The Dutch poet J.C. Bloem also heard the "whisper of freedom" in the whirl of the airplane engines, as seen in his "Ode to the Allied pilots" which freely translated reads:

We who on somber winter nights
huddled servile, in homes locked up,
heard beyond the intolerable Now
a whisper of freedom.

"Wij die in de sombere winternachten
slaven hokten in de besloten huizen
hoorden boven 't nimmer te aanvaarden heden
't ruischen der vrijheid."

Our hearts broke open, dizziness
Surging through oppressed bodies
and Life, while still suffocating, now
again seemed infinite.

“En het hart ging open en duizelingen
voeren door de lichamen der verdrukten
en het leven, daags nog alleen beklemming,
scheen weer oneindig.”

Shortly after the war had ended, an inhabitant of Spijk in Groningen described the feeling that had overpowered him in December 1943 when, after being mocked by two German soldiers, he had caught sight of Allied airplanes high in the sky overhead:

“I am no longer thinking about the humiliation that I just suffered. I am shaking from expectation. I can see the airplanes growing in size. The black dots are becoming four-engine bombers and the little specks are hunter planes, shining like quick silver in the sunlight. As I listen enthralled to the mighty growl of their iron hearts, there begins ... suddenly sirens begin to wail in Delfzijl ... in Emden ... I can feel myself becoming happy. It is as if this cold December day has stepped aside, making room for the wonderful days of May. Days that can be so full of hopefulness. Even deeper than that cold, the reality suddenly cut through me. We are not alone struggling against the Germans. No, we have thousands and millions of friends who risk their lives every day for us. The Germans certainly cannot keep this up for long and then we will be free.”⁵

At the beginning of 1944, prisoners being held in the jail in Groningen tried courageously to keep each other's morale up by tapping 'V for victory' on the radiator pipes each time that Allied airplanes flew over.⁶

The Allies consciously stimulated such longing for freedom and for restoration of relations with the free world. On their flights to Germany, bombers dropped pamphlets over The Netherlands with titles such as *The RAF Post*, *Knickerbockers Weekly Free Netherlands*, *Vrij Nederland* or *De Wervelwind* [The Tornado]. In May 1943, the *Maandblad voor Vrijheid, Waarheid en Recht* [Monthly Magazine for Freedom, Truth, and Justice] also circulated by the RAF was exchanged for *De Vliegende Hollander* [The Flying Dutchman] which would eventually reach a circulation of 5,500,000 copies each month.⁷ On various occasions, RAF planes dropped gift parcels over The Netherlands. For example, on Queen Wilhelmina's birthday in 1941, orange-colored⁸ packages of cigarettes bearing either a crowned 'W' for Wilhelmina or a white 'V' for victory dropped from the sky. The packaging was so popular and fetched such high prices on the black market that Ernest Voorhoeve, the *NSB* (*Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging*) propaganda leader, began duplicating them, thus filling his coffers with ca. 30,000 Dutch guilders.⁹ In the spring of 1943, bags of coffee beans were dropped into the country where almost everyone had become accustomed to the taste of surrogate coffee. A label hanging from each sack bore the text “The Netherlands will rise again! Take courage! From the coffee planters of Suriname.” At the same time, little orange boxes appeared containing a chocolate letter 'V' for victory and the text “Greetings to the children in The Netherlands from the children in Indonesia.”¹⁰ In August 1944, an inhabitant of Noord-Brabant wrote in his diary:

“Today is Queen Wilhelmina's birthday. We would not have thought about it except this morning we found her photograph scattered in various places after having been dropped over The Netherlands the night before by the RAF.”¹¹

Allied Air Force combatants made a huge impression on children as well as on adults, as seen in a letter written in 1941 by a 12-year-old boy from Millingen to his sister:

“ ... Mom and I are alone at home. Are you also wild about ‘The Ramblers’? I have built an altar and I already have five different chasubles. I don’t think that I will become a priest mind you. I dare to bet, if you had to guess, that you would never guess what I want to be. So, I want to become a pilot, a flier ... what more can I tell you? O yes, a while back a pilot crashed here, an Englishman from the RAF. We found all sorts of things: bullets and piece of the plane’s wing and an airman’s boots. They were buried here. And their names are A.W. Astle, S.H. Burley, L.D. Norman, Sjak Tarrant and the name of the fifth man is unknown. Now I have to close. Bye Liesje. Say hello to the boys for me! P.S. You should write down those English names, boys, that will be good for history.”¹²

Not every child, however, experienced the air warfare as positive and exciting. Even in someone so young the memory of the death struggle of Allied airmen was sometimes etched with indelible ink on the mind’s eye.¹³

When the battle ended badly for the Allied airmen, then these representatives of the free world literally came tumbling out of the heavens. Their clothes, cigarettes, chewing gum, chocolate which they often carried and the language that they spoke were for the Dutch, who had become impoverished and cut off from the outside world, symbols of freedom and the material wealth that they hoped to have in their lives again.

On 11 December 1943, when a flier parachuted from an American aircraft over Onnen, just south of Groningen, a large group of people flocked to the landing site. One of the bystanders later stated:

“It was just like a carnival. We stood in a circle around the man and asked ‘When is the invasion starting?’ Naturally he did not know the answer but he replied: ‘We will come, we will surely come!’.”¹⁴

It was not only the church-goers in Holten who had interpreted the arrival of parachutists as a sign that the Allied invasion had begun. The unfortunate fliers themselves then had to explain that their arrival was less than a joyous occasion.¹⁵ The invasion was also a topic of conversation between the inhabitants of ‘De Zwarte Plak’ and the radio operator Jack Trend who was the sole survivor when his Lancaster bomber crashed on 12 June 1944 near the village of Meerlo in northern Limburg.¹⁶

“Jack Trend could give us a first-hand eye-witness report of the Allied landing in Normandy on the morning of 6 June because he had been the radio operator on board a Halifax that had taken part in the bombing of the French town of Ouistreham. On the same day, he had made a second bombing run on Lisieux. Never in his life had this small Englishman, not yet 20 years old, seen so much war equipment and so many troops at the same time as he had seen that morning when he looked out of the window of his plane to see a gigantic fleet of ships crossing the English Channel.”

However, not only the invasion was to determine the commitment of Allied airplanes and the frequency in which they visited the air space above occupied territory.

2.2. Phases in the aerial offensive above The Netherlands

On the morning of 10 May 1940, many Dutchmen were awakened by the rumbling sound of airplane engines overhead. Some people thought that the planes were making practice runs, while

others assumed that they were German aircraft setting course towards England. However, it soon became apparent to everyone that The Netherlands was under attack and that the German Air Force (*Luftwaffe*) had become master of Dutch airspace.

Ever since Hitler had come to power in January 1933, the government of The Netherlands had hoped to avoid an armed confrontation with its neighbor to the east. Economically dependent upon export to Germany, The Netherlands had tried to soothe political tensions between the two countries that had been caused, for example, by the presence of German refugees in The Netherlands, on the one hand, or by national-socialist activities by Germans within Dutch territory, on the other hand. At first, it had appeared that German aggression was only directed towards the east; however, after November 1939, the Dutch government had received secret information about an oncoming German assault. Because Hitler had repeatedly delayed making this move, partly because of weather conditions, the Dutch authorities no longer paid heed to these warnings. Hoping that a policy of strict neutrality would save The Netherlands from war, as had happened during the Great War, i.e., World War I, the Dutch government refrained from educating the population about the dangers that lay ahead. For example, it often censored Dutch newspapers that were about to publish news which was unfavorable to Nazi Germany. Therefore, the invasion on 10 May 1940 came as a complete surprise to large parts of the population. After some initial skirmishes, it soon became apparent that the Dutch army could hold out for only a few days. The Dutch Cabinet and the Royal Family (with Queen Wilhelmina at the head) decided to seek refuge in London. When on 14 May 1940 German airplanes brought disaster to Rotterdam by bombing the center of the city and then threatened to continue bombing other Dutch cities, the Dutch army capitulated. Several weeks thereafter, Belgium and a large part of France were forced to capitulate as well. This German victory, however, did not mean that the skies over The Netherlands would soon be peaceful again. During the next five years, the battle for air superiority over Western Europe would also rage above The Netherlands. The course and intensity of this aerial warfare would determine the degree to which men and women on the ground would be called upon to help Allied aircrew whose aircraft had been shot down.

After their many victories in Western Europe, Hitler and his Air Marshall Goering had hoped to be able quickly to implement 'Operation Seelöwe' which was their plan to conquer the British Isles. In order for this plan to succeed, it was imperative that the German *Luftwaffe* establish air supremacy above Britain. Thus, at the beginning of July 1940, the attack on England better known as the 'Battle of Britain' began. On 13 August 1940, Goering intensified the German attack still further by commencing 'Operation *Adlerangriff*', the strategy which was to weaken Great Britain before the Seelöwe offensive could begin. Although one always speaks of the 'Battle of Britain', it must be remembered that the actual combat was not only limited to British airspace. The British Royal Air Force (RAF) also bombed airfields in The Netherlands where German planes were taking off on their deadly runs to England. Schiphol airport in Amsterdam as well as the airfields at Haamstede, Vlissingen, Leeuwarden and Eindhoven were repeatedly bombed by the RAF. The warships and landing craft of the German Navy (*Kriegsmarine*) anchored in Dutch ports were also repeatedly attacked by the RAF.

Although the Germans had three times as many airplanes at their disposal, they were unable to win the battle, and 'Operation *Adlerangriff*' failed completely. Between 10 July and 30 October 1940, the *Luftwaffe* suffered the loss of 1,733 aircraft while the British lost only 915 airplanes.¹⁷ On 12 October 1940, the Germans were forced to 'delay' their 'Operation Seelöwe'.

However, this did not result in a reduction in or disappearance of military air traffic above The Netherlands – naturally civilian air traffic had already been totally eliminated. After the Battle of

Britain, the flow of airplanes increased, but now they were Allied aircraft flying eastward. British planes set course towards Germany especially to bomb the Ruhr region, a highly industrialized area just beyond the Dutch-German border known to be the heart of the German weapons industry. Because many aircraft were shot down in this area, it was cynically named 'Happy Valley' by Allied fliers. Early in the war, Allied bombers had had to approach enemy territory without the escort of fighter planes. At that time there was still no type of fighter plane available which was capable of making the round trip between England and Germany. Fuel tanks had to be kept small to ensure that a craft was lightweight and highly maneuverable, i.e., the characteristics of a fighter plane. In addition, in 1940, the RAF still had few bombers and the airplanes in their fleet were unable to carry heavy loads of bombs. Their ability to navigate on bombing runs was limited, and it was especially difficult for the navigator to plot a certain course because the planes were forced to fly only at night.

Soon after their victory in Europe, the Germans drew an air-defense line through The Netherlands, the organization of which was placed under the command of Major General Joseph Kammhuber, who had set up his headquarters in Slot Zeist in the center of The Netherlands. The German line of defense consisted of fighter planes, radar, search lights and anti-aircraft artillery. By the summer of 1940, the Germans had already established 2,600 pieces of anti-aircraft artillery in The Netherlands. In the winter of 1940-1941, a second line of defense, the so-called Kammhuber Line, was drawn stretching from the coastline of Denmark to below the Ruhr area, running almost parallel to the German-Dutch border. Thereafter, anti-aircraft weapons were set up in the corridor between the first and second lines of defense, and the *Luftwaffe* had as many as twenty-two Dutch airfields at their disposal.¹⁸

The result was deadly. In 1940 the British lost 137 airplanes above The Netherlands. That this number of casualties was still small, compared to the large number of losses that would later be suffered, was due to the fact that not until the spring of 1941 was the RAF able to instigate clearly offensive operations against the enemy. In contrast, by the end of 1941, the *Luftwaffe* had recorded more frequent successes due to its improved radar and direction-finding equipment. The RAF could only try to match and overwhelm German air defense by sending massive waves of planes simultaneously over particular areas of enemy territory. This tactic resulted, however, in an increase in the intensity of aerial confrontations.

After the German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, the RAF Bomber Command intensified its attacks on Germany. As long as a second Allied ground front in Europe was impossible, the British felt compelled to support the Russians in any way possible from the air. As a result of this intensified RAF air offensive, in 1941 ca. 300 British planes crashed on Dutch soil.¹⁹ The word 'soil' or 'land' should not be read too literally because, in 1940 and 1941, of all the aircraft shot down above Dutch territory, from 20% to 25% landed in the IJsselmeer, the Wadden Sea or Dutch territorial waters.²⁰ For example, in Zuid-Holland, just in the village of Rockanje alone, twenty-seven bodies of Allied crewmen were washed ashore during the war.²¹

Early in 1942 the character of RAF bombardments changed when, on 22 February 1942, Air Marshal [Sir] Arthur Travers Harris who had quickly been nicknamed 'Bomber Harris' was placed in charge of the RAF Bomber Command. As new commander, Harris had realized that so-called 'precision bombing' on military and industrial targets in Germany had yet had little effect. Thus, in his opinion, the RAF must instead change its tactics and begin using 'area bombing' in which complete city districts would be bombed in order to demoralize the population. As a result of such 'carpet bombing', the old towns of Lübeck and Rostock were almost completely incinerated in

the spring of 1942. Employing at least 1,000 – if not more – aircraft simultaneously, the RAF bombarded the large German cities of Cologne, Essen and Bremen in May and June 1942.

Using massive waves of hundreds of aircraft, as well as continuous ('round-the-clock') bombing, the British were able to minimize their own losses, although this tactic meant that casualties were concentrated in a shorter time span. During the second nocturnal RAF raid in which ca. 1,000 bombers participated, thirty-two planes were lost, twenty-one of which crashed on Dutch soil.²² To execute such extensive long-range carpet bombing successfully, the RAF needed larger aircraft. Thus, four-engine planes such as the Short Stirling and Handley Page Halifax were introduced.

Because more crewmen were needed to fly these large machines, their introduction had far-reaching consequences regarding the numbers of airmen who might survive a crash. Until 1942, the RAF usually had flown relatively small bombers, such as the Hampden, Wellington and Whitley, which required only four to six crewmen. It had been proven quite difficult for crewmen to escape from these small machines in an emergency. In addition, smaller planes were light-weight, making an airman's chance for surviving a crash slight. In 1942, it became necessary to extend the crew further to include several gunners in order to avert enemy fighter attacks.

The crews for Halifax and Lancaster bombers, extensively used by the RAF, consisted of approximately seven individuals: the pilot, navigator, flight engineer, radio operator, bombardier/nose-turret gunner,²³ top turret gunner and tail gunner. Somewhat later, the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) began taking part in the aerial battles within the European war theater. The American B-17 and B-24 bombers usually had ten crewmen: the pilot, co-pilot, navigator, flight engineer/gunner, radio operator/gunner, bombardier, right waist gunner, left waist gunner, tail gunner, and ball turret gunner.

In 1942, ca. 360 Allied planes were lost above The Netherlands.²⁴ Soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, American military aircraft arrived in the operational war theater in Western Europe. However, at first, the US Eighth Air Force was only involved in air strikes upon small targets within a short flying range from Great Britain where it was stationed.

On 21 January 1943, during the conference held in Casablanca, the government leaders of Great Britain (Winston Churchill) and the United States (Theodore Roosevelt) agreed to participate in a concerted air offensive called 'Operation Point Blank' against Germany. Six days later, on 27 January 1943, American bombers were already carrying out their first daylight attack on Germany. Thereafter, an almost continuous 'round-the-clock' bombardment took place in which RAF aircraft made nocturnal raids while USAAF airplanes continued the bombardments during the daytime.

The appearance of huge formations of heavy bombers during the day made an immense impression on the Dutch population still living in occupied territory. The USAAF used a 'hedge-hog' or rounded formation in their operations in which the smallest group consisted of six to seven aircraft. Together three such groups formed what was called a 'combat box', and three combat boxes formed a 'combat wing' consisting of approximately sixty airplanes. For a bombing offensive, a flight pattern was constructed of various wings. The entire formation, made up of various groups flying at different altitudes to provide maximum defense against enemy fighters, tempted many an on-looker on the ground to try counting the planes as they flew overhead. Another new phenomenon for the Dutch were the many long streaks of condensation which the planes left written across the sky. At first, people could only guess what this meant, and it was actually thought that the lines were being laid out to designate the course that the planes should follow.

It did not take long for the American Flying Fortresses and Liberators to become a trusted sight in the skies above The Netherlands. Within a short time, however, the *Luftwaffe* had discovered how their fighters could penetrate an American combat wing. Moreover, soon after shooting down their 1,000th RAF bomber on 10 September 1942,²⁵ the *Luftwaffe* perfected their defense by fitting their fighters with an on-board radar system.

Whereas from 1940 through 1942 ca. 800 RAF planes had been shot down over The Netherlands, in the period from 1943 to 1945 as many as 3,500 RAF and USAAF aircraft would crash within the country, particularly during 1943 and the first half of 1944. In the summer of 1943, air battles between the *Luftwaffe* and Allied forces were particularly bloody over Germany and The Netherlands.

From March until August 1943, as the 'Battle of the Ruhr' raged, ca. 800 planes bombarded the industrial heartland of Germany every night. Of the 18,506 flights made during this air offensive, as many as 872 RAF bombers were lost between 5 March and 14 July.²⁶

Tens of planes belonging to both the Allies and the *Luftwaffe* were shot down daily, many above The Netherlands. For example, during the night of 13 May 1943, twenty Allied bombers crashed in the north of the country.²⁷ Ten days later, during a nocturnal bombing raid on Münster, twenty-eight planes crashed within Dutch territory.²⁸ A record loss was set on the night of 21 June when no fewer than forty-four RAF planes were shot down above The Netherlands.²⁹ In the annals of military aviation history, 28 July marked the beginning of the period better known as the 'bloody summer of 1943'.³⁰

Among the most notable achievements of the aerial offensive were the RAF attack which took place on 17 August on Peenemünde and the USAAF bombardment of the Messerschmitt factory in Regensburg on the Danube and the ball-bearing factory in Schweinfurth. It was in Peenemünde that the Germans were developing their V-rockets which, near the end of the war, would bring death and destruction to the city of London. The British aerial attack on this installation was responsible for delaying its deployment for several months. During the RAF bombing of Peenemünde, approximately forty of the almost 600 RAF aircraft employed were lost. During the USAAF bombardments on Regensburg and Schweinfurth, a total of sixty American heavy bombers were shot down, killing 600 crewmen. The *Luftwaffe* lost only twenty-five fighter planes.³¹ Although the three target areas had been badly hit, the Germans were able to repair the damaged production facilities rapidly. Thus on 14 October 1943, the USAAF once again attempted to destroy the industrial complex at Schweinfurth completely. The air raid was to be known as 'Black Thursday' for once again the USAAF had lost sixty four-engine bombers. Because of the extensive losses that were incurred, it became imperative that the USAAF re-think its strategy.

After the summer of 1943, the situation improved somewhat. With the introduction of the P38 Lightning and P47 Thunderbolt escort fighters, which were equipped with the so-called fuel 'drop tanks' that could be jettisoned when empty, the American bombers could be given escort up to the Dutch-German border. Many drop tanks would land on Dutch soil.

From December 1943, American bombers were even being escorted deep into German air space by P51 Mustang escort fighters.³² The introduction of escort fighter planes was not only advantageous to the USAAF when they had to bomb important German targets. In addition, their presence permitted a second goal to be realized, i.e. enticing German fighters into 'dogfights' in order to decimate their numbers.

The weather during the winter of 1943-1944 seriously hindered the Allied aerial offensive. It was during this period that the Allies had hoped to launch a strategic bombing offensive on Germany in order to gain air superiority and pave the way for the planned Allied invasion of Western Europe. Thus, whenever the weather permitted, Allied formations could be seen in the air. On 11 January 1944, for example, twenty heavy bombers and three fighters crashed in Dutch territory.

Between 18 November 1943 and 24 March 1944, RAF aircraft were locked in combat with the *Luftwaffe* in the 'Battle of Berlin'. To reach Berlin, RAF bombers were required to fly deep into enemy territory where for many hours they were left vulnerable to German anti-aircraft artillery. The battle reached a peak in January 1944, and the series of heavy attacks between 19 and 26 February have been recorded in history as the 'Big Week'.

As well as the city of Berlin, Germany itself was bombed on a large scale during the first few months of 1944 as the Allies attempted to reduce the capacity of the *Luftwaffe* and to destroy German supply lines. Airplane factories, oil and electricity installations, railroads, etc., suffered greatly. Allied bombers themselves were not spared during these attacks. In the first three months of 1944, RAF losses reached an absolute record; during the Battle of Berlin, the RAF lost a total of 1,000-1,100 bombers.³³ The largest loss during a single mission occurred during the night raid on Neurenberg on 30 March 1944, when ninety-five of the 795 bombers (i.e. 12%) were reported missing in action.

For the US Eighth Air Force the worst was still to come. During April 1944, the Americans had to report 512 airplanes as missing and another sixty-five as being irreparably damaged.³⁴ This was the heaviest loss in a single month. Thus, because of these developments, February, March and April 1944 were the busiest months during the entire war for Dutch 'pilot helpers' on the ground.³⁵

Almost immediately after this black period for the Allied air forces, the tide suddenly turned in their favor. After April 1944, the strategic bombing offensive on Germany was greatly reduced, namely, after June 1944 Allied aircraft were mainly deployed to give tactical support to the Allied ground offensive that had begun on 6 June with the invasion off the coast of Normandy.

In the second half of 1944, because Allied airplanes were no longer flying deep into enemy territory, casualties were far fewer than during the Battle of Berlin and preparation for opening a second front in Western Europe when so many aircraft and crewmen had been lost. Another reason for fewer casualties was that larger areas of Europe had already been liberated so that Allied airmen were flying for shorter periods over enemy-held territory. Moreover, early in 1944, while preparing for the Allied invasion of Normandy, the RAF and USAAF had succeeded in destroying a large part of the German aircraft industry as well as eliminating many German fighters. The German oil industry had also been heavily damaged by the bombardments, creating an oil shortage. As a result, almost no fuel could be allocated to the *Luftwaffe* for training flights so that German pilots soon became less skilled. Between June and October 1944, the *Luftwaffe* lost 13,000 men which equaled almost one-half of their total losses during the three preceding years.³⁶ The percentage of Allied casualties, in comparison, decreased from ca. 6% in January 1944 to 0.35% in April 1945.

Now suffering few losses within German air space, the number of Allied aircraft actually increased and production of new aircraft far exceeded those airplanes lost in action. This resulted in a change in Allied strategy in the autumn of 1944. While the Allied air forces continued playing a tactical role, they could again be used for massive bombardments to eliminate as completely as possible the German war machine. Thus after September 1944, the Americans regularly flew 1,000-plane

daylight missions over Germany. On Christmas evening in 1944, a record was set when 1,400 planes dropped their bombs over the heart of the German Third Reich.

Allied attacks upon communication and transport lines had consequences for the Dutch population, both visibly and tangibly. After October 1942, Mosquito fighter bombers, Typhoons and Spitfires also attacked targets and transport lines within Dutch territory which were important for the enemy. In the beginning, attacks were incidental and made at night. However, after the summer of 1944, the attacks took place during the daytime and were more systematic.

Once the Allied armies had gained a foothold on the mainland of Western Europe, fighter squadrons were able to fly their missions from airfields within France. Attacks on trains became especially frequent. By the middle of September, after a breakthrough from Northern France through Belgium, the Allied forces seemed to be on the verge of liberating The Netherlands. A combined air-ground offensive was planned by Field Marshall Montgomery. To aid this offensive, the Dutch government-in-exile in London called for a strike by all Dutch railway personnel, anticipating that it would be a matter of days before the whole of The Netherlands would be liberated. Because 'Operation Market Garden' as the offensive was named failed, only the southern part of The Netherlands was now free. A harsh winter (known as the 'winter of hunger') awaited the northern part of the country in which many people would die due to famine, which was partly caused by the breakdown in communications. After the Dutch railway strike, the Germans began placing anti-aircraft artillery in train stations as well as on some trains. This anti-aircraft defense was repeatedly successful in shooting down Allied fighter planes, which carried only one pilot.

Nearly gone were the days when shooting down an Allied airplane would result in a ten-man crew crashing upon Dutch soil.

2.3. Borrowed time

Nearly daily the Dutch could watch with great interest the spectacle of airplanes flying overhead. A farm worker from Hoogeveen related:

"In the daytime, sometimes you just lay down on your back upon the ground, shading your eyes with a hand when it was sunny. Then you saw many groups of airplanes, about thirty all together. In just three groups there were already about 100 planes so that you could keep on counting right up to 1,000. Their noise set the window panes vibrating in their casings. You could feel that liberation was getting closer."³⁷

However, the crewmen in these bombers that were being observed from the ground had no such opportunity to lean back and relax. As soon as the Allied airplanes approached the Dutch coastline, the crewmen had to be especially alert for anti-aircraft activity coming from the first line of German air defense. This was true both for the Americans who were making their bombing runs during the daytime and for the British who carried out their missions during the night. The British airman George Duffee, on his first nocturnal bombing mission to Germany on 22 June 1943, described his experience as co-pilot upon entering the German defense zone as follows:

"Fifty miles to the Dutch coastline I suddenly heard the navigator announce calmly over the intercom. I looked around and saw bundles of light that all at once cleaved the darkness and tiny explosions that gave off light under us. 'They are ready to receive us', I mused. Closer and closer came the searching fingers of light. The sky grew lighter and lighter until the entire firmament became a panorama of shells exploding in varying colors and the darkness was

penetrated with the rays of search lights. There was no longer a feeling of loneliness, but rather the 'tingling' sensation that someone was hunting us down."³⁸

An airplane departing from England for its destination in Germany was vulnerable to enemy anti-aircraft artillery for at least one hour during each leg of its roundtrip flight. If the machine was hit by German flak (*Flieger-* or *Flugabwehrkanonen*),³⁹ then the pilot usually attempted to keep it flying as long as possible, hoping either to reach the airbase in England or, as a last resort, to ditch the craft in the North Sea within reach of the Air-Sea Rescue Patrol of the Coastal Command that kept watch for downed airmen in order to lend them a helping hand. Once an airplane had been hit, it usually fell behind, unable to keep pace within the formation. Lagging behind as a 'straggler' – like an animal which has strayed from its herd – it became easy prey for German fighters. However, if vital parts of the machine had been damaged, then a different decision would have to be made.

It should be noted in passing that not only German artillery was responsible for wrecking Allied airplanes. Numerous technical defects, such as leaking oil lines, defective oxygen systems, or faulty engines, were also causal. Airplanes flying in tight formations regularly collided with each other due to windy conditions or turbulence. In addition, human error was sometimes to blame.

The B-17 airplane named 'Borrowed Time' which crashed in Pijnacker, near The Hague, on Easter day in 1944 is such an appropriate example. During the war, per air offensive, a 4%-6% loss was usual for the RAF; however, some aerial operations resulted in losses as great as 10%.⁴⁰ On an average, an airman in the British Bomber Command completed 9.1 flights.⁴¹ The scheme used for rotating both American and British pilots was based on these statistics. RAF personnel were given a respite of six months after flying thirty operational flights above Germany, i.e. their next missions would not take them over enemy-occupied territory. After flying twenty-five operational missions, American fliers were sent back to the United States. Missions that had been cancelled prematurely as well as operations above Belgium, France and The Netherlands only counted as one-third of a mission. Only one in three crew members of Bomber Command completed thirty operational flights and, as a result of such heavy losses, individuals flying Allied bombers were more frequently found to be very inexperienced pilots. By the middle of 1943, crewmen flying British bombers averaged only forty operational hours of flying.⁴² Often ground personnel, having no more than a basic technical knowledge of flying, were taken on board as co-pilot. They were expected to learn to fly from first-hand on-board experience and later be able to replace the chief pilot if he were taken ill or injured.

When a machine crashed, the chance that anyone on board would survive was minimal. As a result of air combat above German-occupied territory, 55,573 crew members from Great Britain and the Commonwealth lost their lives. In addition, after their planes had been shot down, 9,748 members of the British and Commonwealth air forces found themselves taken prisoner.⁴³ The American Eighth Air Force mourned the death of 43,687 of its men.⁴⁴

In total, ca. 2,500 British and ca. 1,750 American planes would crash over The Netherlands during the entire war.⁴⁵ The British, including Commonwealth, air forces lost 9,000-10,000 airmen above The Netherlands; ca. 1,200 of these men were Canadian.⁴⁶ RAF airplanes were flown by British as well as foreign crewmen, thus representing a good sampling of the Allied countries: Australia, Canada, Czechoslovakia, France, Ireland, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Rhodesia, South Africa, and The Netherlands. At least 6,000 American crewmen died in or over The Netherlands.⁴⁷ About two-thirds of the airmen who crashed onto Dutch soil did not survive.⁴⁸ Of those airmen who

survived, only one in seven managed, with the help of the Dutch, to find a safe haven in which to hide.⁴⁹

During air battles, not only planes were damaged but also crewmen could be badly injured. When a captain was forced to order 'bail out' or 'abandon aircraft', crewmen who were able left the plane either through the escape hatch or bomb-bay doors, if they had not already bailed out in panic. Wounded airmen were often unable to parachute to safety. Not only a hard landing but also the wrench of the harness as the parachute opened would have been too much for an injured man to withstand. Sometimes commanders chose to remain on board with wounded crewmen, hoping to save their lives by successfully making an emergency landing. Occasionally the captain, bound by an unwritten code of honor to leave the plane last, failed to set the plane on the ground safely and thus died with his men. However, on other occasions, fliers were left to their own devices and had to act on their own authority because, for example, the intercom had been damaged by a direct hit from the enemy or because the wounded or dead pilot could no longer issue orders. One example is that of a Lancaster which, in the night of 28 June 1943, had been flying in a 600-plane formation on a bombing raid on Keulen. During the return trip, while over the Dutch coastline, a machine called 'E For Easy' was shot at and set alight by a German fighter. The pilot turned back over the Dutch mainland hoping to make an emergency landing. After the war, Ronald G. Storr, the only crewman on board who survived the crash, told his story as follows:

"I climbed out of my waist turret and tried to move forward but the entire front of the plane looked like an inferno. The heat was tremendous. I reached for my parachute and noticed that it was smoldering. I put out the flames with my hands, hooked on the chute, and got myself out of there. While I tumbled outside the plane and the cold wind hit me with a force, I watched 'E for Easy' disappear as a burning carcass above me. Flames that were meters long poured out of the rump but the engines still looked intact. I was given little time to concentrate on the Lancaster because almost immediately after pulling the cord of my chute a second airplane thundered past me. It felt like I was seeing an entire film played out within just a few moments, because at the same moment I realized that it was the fighter that had just shot our plane down. With one pull the parachute opened. I felt a brief sharp pain in my crotch. Then a huge umbrella opened above me. 'E for Easy' had disappeared to the east. The fighter was also gone. The only thing that I heard was the whisper of the wind and – I shall never forget it – the barking of a dog somewhere below me."⁵⁰

The death struggle of an aircraft and its crew was often observed from the ground, such as what took place in the early hours of 3 August 1941, described by an inhabitant of Scharl near Staveren.

"... being awakened by a peculiar noise. From the southeast, low over the IJsselmeer, a fireball was approaching, radiating an ominous rosy glow. It was a horrific sight to behold and the noise was just as terrifying – it was the typical, unbelievably sinister sound of an airplane in distress. ... The fireball flew further on its disastrous course, dropping lower as it went. The ghostly light moved away from the farms in Scharl and passed along the harbor of Staveren before the drama ended with unrelenting cruelty. A few kilometers northwest of Noorderhoofd, the fireball exploded plunging into the dark awaiting waters of the IJsselmeer. A heavy plop and a penetrating hiss as the heat of red-hot metal was extinguished in cold water ..., and then suddenly the fire was ablaze again as burning fuel gushed from the wing tanks as they cracked open, turning the area where the plane had crashed into an inferno."⁵¹

The Friesians along the shore of the IJsselmeer had witnessed the last struggle of the Wellington R1800 and its five-man crew which was returning from a bombing mission over Hannover and Frankfurt.

Sometimes airmen were lucky enough to outlive the plane, although it was rare when everyone on board reached ground alive. Often the plane was already flying too low for an airman to parachute successfully, and occasionally a chute would fail to open. In other cases, fliers would forget to count up to ten, according to the required procedure, before pulling the ripcord. Thus a parachute, opening too soon, would become helplessly entangled with the airplane. Repeatedly Germans on the ground had the opportunity to shoot at fliers dangling from their parachutes while drifting towards earth.⁵² However, even after reaching ground alive and in one piece, an Allied airman was still not safe.

2.4. First decisive moments on the ground

Six out of seven fliers fortunate enough to survive a crash could expect to be arrested soon after touching ground. There were various reasons why an airman often could not escape quickly. Once safe upon the ground, the sudden discovery that fellow crewmen had been killed or the uncertainty of not knowing what fate had befallen missing mates was sometimes enough to send confused survivors into a state of shock,⁵³ thus hindering their ability to think clearly and respond rapidly. It was those first few crucial minutes on the ground that were usually decisive – would it be freedom or captivity. Some crash survivors had been wounded, many times having been burnt when their planes were attacked or having experienced unfortunate parachute landings that caused ankles or legs to be wounded. Some airmen chose not to abandon their wounded mates, even when it meant being arrested together. When parachutists had been wounded, the possibility of hiding them successfully was considered slight because ordinary citizens could not provide the necessary medical treatment. Even Dutch doctors when called for consultation frequently recommended, in these cases, that the wounded be handed over as POWs so that they could receive adequate medical care in hospital.

Moreover, there has been a case reported of a flier who, after breaking his leg during a landing near Venlo in July 1941, was later freed by the organized resistance movement from the local hospital where he had been taken to recover.⁵⁴ In addition, in the spring of 1944, a belly-turret gunner whose right leg had been amputated below the knee was freed from the hospital in Venlo by a Dutch '*knokploeg*' (KP, or strong-armed gang of resistance workers). He was taken to a resistance 'hideout' camp in the woods where he received care during the remainder of the occupation.⁵⁵

Because of the flat open nature of the Dutch landscape, it was usually possible to see far in advance and from quite a distance where a plane or airmen dangling from their parachutes would touch ground, and it did not take the German authorities or Dutch police long to arrive at the scene. Barbed-wire barriers and ditches frequently complicated a flier's chance for rapid escape. It was not uncommon for parachutists to lose one or both combat boots during their descent, making escape on foot no simple task. Many airmen lost precious time needed to escape because they first tried to burn their papers and set fire to their plane as instructed.⁵⁶ They had also been told to bury their parachutes which was not an easy task when the ground was frozen hard.

One large problem which remained throughout the entire occupation was the tremendous turnout among the local population after a crash. With so many people on hand, it was difficult to keep secret where surviving crewmen were being hidden; thus, if a crowd gathered, few people – even those individuals who were otherwise active in the resistance – were willing to take part in the

illegal activity of helping the Allies.⁵⁷ The observant enemy authorities needed to spend little time or exert much energy to discover the whereabouts of downed pilots. A general practitioner from the village of Elim near Hoogeveen related the following:

“It was late in the afternoon, in the autumn of 1944. American bombers were again returning from Germany. Somewhere above Schuinesloot, that’s about where they were flying overhead, four or five lads parachuted from their plane. Everyone saw the boys coming down and the entire village turned out, including members of the *NSB*. As far as that goes, any attempt to get the boys to a shelter after they had touched ground was already a lost cause. I went to the site, said that I was a doctor, and asked if anyone had been wounded. The airmen were all in good shape, and I took three or four of the lads to my home. Within minutes my house was surrounded by German soldiers, just young boys themselves. They came in with their rifles in position. ... They took the Americans, large hefty lads, with them as prisoners.”⁵⁸

Just how dangerous it was to hide fliers after many people had seen them come down was clearly demonstrated in Haulerwijk on 26 November 1944. Late one Sunday morning, a co-pilot named Dean Barker landed under his parachute in the middle of the ice skating rink. People flocked from the surrounding area to see the spectacle. Kees de Vree, a policeman who at that moment was charged with guarding a shop that had been confiscated, was urged by a woman in the neighborhood to go immediately to the ice rink and arrest the flier. De Vree went to the specified location and discovered the airman busily folding his chute together with a number of people. The policeman did nothing, even when someone from the group took the flier away to safety. A few hours later, De Vree was arrested after a member of the *NSB* had filed a complaint against him. He escaped by a hair’s breadth and was eventually freed only because a former school friend, who was now a policeman and member of the *NSB*, put in a good word on his behalf. Three other people who had been involved in helping the pilot and several other crewmen from the plane were arrested during a house-to-house search and later died in Neuengamme.⁵⁹

Not only the presence of crowds but also the threat of being watched by the Germans was influential when deciding whether to help downed airmen escape being taken prisoners of war, as clearly shown by the following example related by Daan Visser. On 15 August 1941, Daan and his brother Cornelis who were on board their Workumer fishing boat WK26⁶⁰ picked up four British crewmen from a rubber lifeboat after their Vickers Wellington bomber had made an emergency landing in the IJsselmeer.

“Naturally Kees and I were glad that we were able to pick these boys up, but in the meantime we had a problem: where should we take them? It was obvious that they had to get to land as quickly as possible. We couldn’t keep them on board with us and they needed dry clothing badly. Thus – back to Workum it was although Germans were billeted there. The men would be arrested immediately and we didn’t like that idea at all. You just don’t hand your friends over to the Krauts. Anyway, there was a big chance that the German observation tower on Tointsje had been able to watch our rescue operation through their binoculars ... any way you looked at it, we had no choice. We tried to make this clear to the Brits and they seemed to understand. ... If only in heaven’s name we had been able to keep those boys out of the Kraut’s hands. ... Ach, we navigated back to our berth at the locks and put the boys on shore with the lock keeper. ... We were glad that we had been able to get the Brits out of the water but furious to have to hand them over to the Germans ... and we didn’t want to see that happen so we returned to the IJsselmeer immediately.”⁶¹

Especially at the beginning of the occupation, it was not always clearly understood that immediate action was imperative if crash survivors were to reach a temporary hiding place successfully. While people were still deliberating about what should be done with their 'guest' who had just dropped in, the police or German authorities would have ample time to reach the spot. Hungry for news from the free world, the Dutch regularly took the airmen to their homes to hear more about how the war was progressing.

On the other hand, downed airmen themselves frequently overlooked the need for moving quickly. A parachutist who had landed near Dalfsen early in 1942 first knelt to the ground to offer a prayer of thanksgiving before removing himself from the site.⁶² In the early hours of 29 January 1944, an Allied airman landed near Losdorp in the province of Groningen. He was taken to the local café proprietor and news spread quickly through the village that an English pilot could be admired at the pub. The man was enjoying himself immensely and, remembering his escape money, paid many rounds of drink. Just as he was ready to settle his bill and depart, the Germans appeared.⁶³ On 17 September 1944, a glider carrying twenty-eight 'airbornes' crashed near Kaatsheuvel. The men on board decided first to pause at the edge of the woodland where they had landed to brew a cup of tea. Fortunately they were discovered by members of the 'André' resistance group rather than by the German authorities. Shortly thereafter, the men were taken to Udenhout where they later witnessed the liberation.⁶⁴

During the last years of the war, airmen were emphatically instructed to make an effort to escape. The resistance had also become more alert and, competing with the enemy authorities, rushed directly to the spot where a plane or parachutists had crashed, sometimes even bringing with them civilian clothing that the fliers could pull over their military uniforms.⁶⁵ When the Germans or police reached the spot, they immediately encircled the plane or parachutist(s) and cordoned off the surrounding area. In several cases, Dutch henchmen, such as members of the *NSB* or *Landwacht* who had sided with the enemy, took charge and held the Allies within their sights until the Germans arrived.⁶⁶ On 7 July 1944, an especially tragic situation occurred just south of Ter Apel. An American co-pilot named Walter B. Shambarger had managed to parachute safely from his plunging Liberator. People arrived from all directions curious to see him. Among the group of onlookers was a 22-year-old member of *Landstorm Nederland*. To everyone's horror, the youth pulled his stiletto and stabbed the pilot to death on the spot.⁶⁷ In general, the Germans behaved correctly towards the airmen who fell into their hands.⁶⁸ Numerous stories have related that the authorities often allowed Allied crewmen to divide their rations among the Dutch onlookers before being taken away. Behavior between Allied fliers and their German counterparts was sometimes chivalrous and friendly on both sides, especially between *Luftwaffe* and Allied airmen,⁶⁹ which was difficult for the beleaguered citizens of The Netherlands to understand. An inhabitant of Middelburg remembered seeing a Hurricane make an emergency landing on 15 February 1941:

"The glass dome of the cockpit was slowly pushed back and the pilot climbed out. At the same moment, a German car stopped carrying several military personnel. The Germans walked over to the Englishman and saluted correctly, with a hand raised to the cap. The Allied pilot returned a salute! It was just like watching a film and the scene didn't look real. One of the Germans obviously spoke good English because an animated conversation between the two men took place. ... Thereafter they exchanged cigarettes, and we were rather irritated by it all."⁷⁰

However, the German authorities and their Dutch henchmen did not always behave correctly. In September 1942, three British fliers, who had survived their crash landing upon a sandbank along the coast of Goeree near Ouddorp, were left to their fate which resulted in their deaths. The

commander of the *Zollgrenzschutz* [border guard] had prevented a lifeboat from going to their rescue.⁷¹ Early in November 1943, an almost identical situation occurred after a B-17 bomber had crashed upon a sandbank along the coast of Schouwen. Labor workers had wanted to save the crew but were forbidden by the Germans to approach the aircraft, resulting in the death of three unfortunate airmen.⁷² In December 1943, the Germans shot several crewmen who had attempted to climb to safety on the wings of their airplane after it had crashed into the waters of the Lek. One of the fliers was shot through the back.⁷³ On 21 November 1944, after two airmen had parachuted from an Allied bomber over Lonneker near Enschede, one flier's chute became entangled in the branches of a tree. A Dutchman, who was otherwise unwilling to help, approached the man dangling in his harness only to ask if he had money or cigarettes. Thereafter the unfortunate pilot fell into the hands of members of the *Sicherheitspolizei* (SD) billeted nearby who soon discovered that the airman was Jewish. Thereafter the airman disappeared and his mate was taken into the woods nearby and executed by a shot in the neck.⁷⁴

There have also been incidents reported in which crewmen were threatened with death during interrogation.⁷⁵ An Allied pilot who had until then been treated correctly expressed his frustration about having been apprehended by spitting in the face of the German lieutenant. The flier was taught a nasty lesson when the German threatened him with a pseudo-execution.⁷⁶

Few crewmen offered resistance upon being caught. In June 1942, two British airmen succeeded in overpowering a sergeant and a Marechaussee who had wanted to transport the men to their barracks. Thereafter, the crewmen escaped after first pinching a bicycle and gun.⁷⁷ Later police or Marechaussee were occasionally known to allow airmen to escape after they had been arrested.⁷⁸ In November 1943, five American crewmen who had been taken prisoner in Zeeland overpowered their guards while they were being transported to the north, and leapt from the train somewhere between Kethel and Delft. One escapee was quickly recaptured, while the four remaining men could be intercepted by the resistance in Overschie and taken via two separate routes to 'pilot helpers'.⁷⁹

In September 1940, a Czech airman, who had made an emergency landing near Leidschendam, responded quite dramatically upon being caught. Both he and a fellow crewman had requested shelter from a resident at Castle Duivenvoorde but to no avail. When the local police arrived to arrest him, the Czech shot himself through the temple with his flare gun and died of his wounds shortly thereafter.⁸⁰

After arrest, military prisoners were almost always transported via Dutch prisons to POW camps situated east of The Netherlands. Airmen were first taken to the *Dulag Luft*, the *Lager* [camp] for *Dienstuntauglichen* [those who no longer were able to serve], a *Luftwaffe* interrogation center in Oberursel to the northwest of Frankfurt am Main. Thereafter airmen were moved to a *Stammlager* or 'Stalag' [communal camp] or to an *Oflag Luft* [*Offizierslager*, an camp for officers] where they remained for the duration of the war. By far, the majority of these Allied airmen survived the camps and were able to return to their homelands after the war.⁸¹

2.5. It looked like the Queen was coming

During the German occupation, the Dutch populace was just as enthusiastic about the surviving British and American airmen who landed safely on the ground as it remained hopeful about Allied airplanes flying in the skies above. Crewmen were seen as "something like angels coming straight from heaven".⁸² When airmen who had survived a crash were led away under arrest, Dutch bystanders often found it difficult to hide the sympathy that they felt for these men.

On 16 July 1941, after having been hit by German anti-aircraft slack, a British Blenheim bomber succeeded in making a safe landing on a barren piece of ground behind the Kruiskade in Rotterdam, not far from the city center, on the river Maas. The three crewmen had decided to remain with their aircraft to await arrest. However, the Dutch in the city who had seen the emergency landing were pleasantly surprised suddenly to stand eye to eye with these representatives of free England. They hoisted the three airmen onto their shoulders and paraded them around making much commotion until the Germans arrived, firing warning shots into the air to stop what looked like a dress rehearsal for liberation festivities. As a result of this scene, a very angry German *Luftwaffe* general named Fr. Christiansen, who bore the title *Wehrmachtbefehlshaber in den Niederlanden*, announced the following warning in a newspaper:

“In light of the numerous airplanes, which have recently been shot down above Dutch territory, it has been repeatedly noted that the populace has shown outright displays of sympathy for the arrested British crew members who were being led away as prisoners. ... Such demonstrations for the enemy ... in any case are characteristic of a brutal provocation against the German Army. The caution that the German Army has shown up until now in such situations appears to have been interpreted by demonstrators as a sign of weakness. The population is thus being warned once again. This warning is being given because the Army has received the order to act in future situations, using weapons if deemed necessary. The consequences must then be carried by the protestors themselves.”⁸³

His words, however, had little effect. Numerous are the stories of public demonstrations of solidarity for Allied airmen who were already under arrest.⁸⁴

In Groningen, at the beginning of 1944, an Allied pilot who had been arrested ostentatiously by German soldiers together with several other crewmen spoke of his fantastic reception by the citizenry.

“They remained standing on the sidewalk and gave us the ‘thumbs up’ or ‘victory’ sign, and a tram that was filled to overflowing slowed down to keep pace with us while everyone inside waved and cheered us on. When we reached the camp, instead of feeling depressed and defeated, we felt victorious.”⁸⁵

It was the American airmen in particular who made a great impression on the public, especially because of their flight jackets with a white fur collar.⁸⁶ Someone who had seen how a number of Americans had been arrested in September 1942 in Elburg later related:

“It looked as if the queen were coming to visit Elburg. The Germans always wore those filthy dirty rags but that American was a tall good-looking fellow with red hair. He was wearing a nice white sweater and fur-trimmed boots. Walked like this ... the people went absolutely crazy.”⁸⁷

Even funerals being held for Allied airmen, who had probably never even walked upon the ground under which they were now being buried, repeatedly turned into testimonials for those men killed in battle.⁸⁸ Later during the occupation, such public expressions of solidarity would cause the German authorities to demand that burials be carried out in silence or that the ceremony be conducted by a German Chaplain to the Forces. Often the populace would band together nevertheless outside the cemetery walls.

On 1 February 1942, when the newly appointed *NSB* mayor of Lichtenvoorde was scheduled to take office at the city hall, he noted that the entire officialdom was absent because everyone had turned up *en masse* for the funerals of four British airmen who had crashed three days earlier. When he realized why the personnel of the city government were not present, he rushed to the public graveyard where to his amazement he heard Vicar Van Dongen deliver a funeral oration which did not disguise that the airmen had died for a just cause. This as well as other cases of pro-Allied sentiment were reason enough to lock the vicar up in concentration camps in Amersfoort and then in Vught several months later.⁸⁹

In 1943 the graves of several British airmen, who had originally been buried in the Crooswijk cemetery in Rotterdam near the monument honoring the Dutch who had died in May 1940, were moved upon German orders because the original location had provided too many reasons to demonstrate solidarity with the Allies.⁹⁰

Germans did not always look the other way when demonstrations took place. In June 1943, for example, thirty inhabitants of Hoogblokland were detained for 24 hours because bystanders had applauded for a British airman who had been arrested.⁹¹ One woman working in a household in Berkel en Rodenrijs got the Germans' dander up by showing her enthusiasm for an Allied airman. She had been present when, in September 1942, the Germans went to the city hall to collect the British airman named Peter Martin who had been arrested after making an emergency landing.

"I had just started washing up when the doorbell rang. Two policemen were standing in the doorway and wanted to ask me some questions. They wanted to know, among other things, if I had waved at the Englishman. When I confessed to having done so, they said that I had to go with them. The entire morning they detained me in a room at the city hall. Meanwhile, I was being pressed to tell who else had waved at the airman. Although I knew everyone who had called out and waved ... my lips remained sealed. Suddenly one of the policemen asked my age. When I replied that I was 17 years old, he told me that I would never see my eighteenth birthday. I broke into tears. Policeman De Ruiter was more reasonable. He knew very well that I had waved to the airman, but, so he said, I should not have done that when the Germans were around. I was greatly relieved when I was sent home again at noon."⁹²

Mayors, policemen, Marechaussee, as well as ordinary citizens, frequently showed friendliness towards arrested airmen, chatting with them and showering them profusely with food and drink.⁹³ Such treatment was not without danger. After a British airman had been rather warmly greeted and treated to food and drink at the city hall in Herkingen on Overflakkee, the deputy-mayor, town clerk and a school teacher were arrested and imprisoned in camp Vught for two and one-half months.

On 8 June 1943, Lieutenant-Colonel Van Hilten, president of the county police corps in Eindhoven, circulated a text repeating the contents of a message from R.H.G. Nitsch, *Aussenstellenleiter der Sipo und des SD* in Maastricht. In the message the German complained about improper police behavior, especially in Limburg, towards airmen under arrest. The police had merely been holding airmen in custody in their waiting room where the airmen could freely be "observed, spoken to and congratulated" by the populace. Van Hilten believed that such behavior could damage people's respect for and trust in the police force. Arrested and wounded airmen were transported "most pompously" by the local police and Marechaussee. It was ordered that, in the future, wounded airmen must not be taken to Dutch hospitals but rather must be delivered to the nearest *Wehrmachtslazarett*. If 'improper' police behavior continued, there would be serious consequences in the future.⁹⁴

Three months later, on 9 September 1943, Van Hilten circulated a message complaining that recently a Dutch mayor had spoken in both English and French to an airman whom the police had already placed under arrest. Van Hilten pointed out that such conduct was absolutely unacceptable.⁹⁵

Apparently Nitsch and Van Hilten's words of warning did not miss their mark. In any case, the underground newspaper *Ons Volk (Den Vaderlant Getrouwe)* [Our Nation: True to the Fatherland] complained in November 1943 about the attitude of police in Limburg shown towards crewmen who had been stranded. It was pointed out that, in Belgium, the chief of the State Police had refused to co-operate or help arrest Allied airmen. In Limburg, in contrast, "the servants of Hermandad [slang: policemen] raced around like lunatics hunting down forbidden game – in this case our airmen".⁹⁶

2.6. Threats and punishments

Enemy soldiers on the run could rely on being protected by the Geneva Convention if arrested and the Germans generally adhered to its specific regulations during World War II. Thus, after an Allied soldier had been detained by the Germans, it was required that he be kept in a military prison located neither in nor near combat zones. A soldier should not be forced to give more information than his name, rank, and service number. A soldier should be allowed to keep his military uniform and any personal possessions. He should be given ample and nutritious food and health care and even be paid according to rank by the nation that had detained him.⁹⁷ While this regulation applied to airmen, it did not protect any civilian who had given help.

Although it is true that the German authorities during their occupation of The Netherlands only issued a formal decree forbidding all forms of 'pilot help' as late as June 1944,⁹⁸ this does not mean that they had not already taken steps to punish this form of resistance. On the contrary, the Germans considered 'pilot help' to be one of the most direct forms of aiding the enemy. While the German occupier had tried to wear the friendliest of faces when dealing with the public during the first months after their invasion of The Netherlands, this attitude did not apply to anyone helping Allied airmen.

As early as 17 May 1940, several days after the Dutch Armed Forces had been forced to capitulate, the German authorities had announced via the press that any form of support to non-German military personnel within occupied territory would be punished by a German military tribunal.

At the end of July 1940, both the Dutch Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Justice, upon direct orders of Hans Albin Rauter (*Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer*), had instructed the Dutch police force to cordon off any area where an Allied airplane had crashed or landed until the German authorities could arrive. The nearest German military or police organizations should be notified immediately. RAF personnel should be arrested on the spot and, if several crewmen were involved, each man should be detained separately. In addition, the police should make it impossible for airmen to come in contact with anyone from the local population.⁹⁹

On 17 August 1940, the German *Luftwaffe* General Fr. Christiansen (*Wehrmachtsbefehlshaber in den Niederlanden*) announced that any help given to Allied airmen would be punishable by death:

"Every observation of a landing, of an airman parachuting or knowledge of the whereabouts of enemy military personnel, as well as every instance in which an item has been dropped from an enemy airplane onto Dutch territory, must be reported to the nearest German military

or police authority. Anyone concealing enemy military personnel, or giving them shelter or help, will be punished according to the German penal code which in certain cases will be the death sentence. Accordingly, a sentence of hard labor has already been pronounced by a German military court. Should similar cases be repeated then, in addition, warrants for the arrest of a suitable number of hostages will be issued.”¹⁰⁰

During the occupation, the German authorities hung posters bearing this warning in numerous public locations.¹⁰¹ About mid-October 1940, an announcement was printed in the *Algemeen Politieblad* [General Police Magazine] saying that the Attorney General was offering a ten-guilder reward to anyone giving information regarding civilians who had aided airmen. Later the reward was raised to fifty guilders. Especially at the beginning of the war, rewards were occasionally higher, running from 500 to 1,000 Dutch guilders which was an enormous amount of money at that time.¹⁰²

On 9 December 1940, the Secretary General from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs circulated a warning in which the populace was told that possession of any object belonging to or coming from Allied airplanes would be punished. Anyone finding such items should report to the local *Luchtbeschermingsdienst* [Air Protection Service] which was then required to contact the nearest *Wehrmacht* authority as well as the Department of Police Affairs within the State Directorship.¹⁰³

That these warnings were not only empty words can be demonstrated by several examples of events occurring one year after the German invasion. In the night of 10 April 1941, a British bomber crashed between the villages of Neer and Roggel. A 34-year-old inhabitant of Roggel who dared get too close to the wreckage was shot dead by the German guards.¹⁰⁴ On 20 April 1941, the German General Christiansen made this fact known in the press and warned that such a fate awaited anyone who did not abide by the regulations.

In spite of this decree, wrecks continued to entice souvenir hunters like a magnet. Wreckage of these huge silver birds, and their alliance with the free world, had an air of magic about them, regardless of their crumpled structures. In addition, one could find many items on board which could be put to good use. Bicycle tires or shoe soles could be made from the rubber. Clothes could be sewn from the parachutes and black-out curtains at the windows. Jewelry could be made from the plexiglass. Food rations and first-aid bandages would obviously be useful. Even things like leaflets, flares, headphones, and a flier's cap were taken away if opportunity allowed. Resistance workers sometimes even attempted to remove gunnery equipment on board and to steal the ammunition. One danger for an airman, if caught off guard, was that a Dutchman might try to steal his identity [dog] tag. These tags were essential to an airman if caught by the Germans when he must prove to the enemy that he was indeed a member of a foreign military power rather than just a spy who could be executed.¹⁰⁵

Souvenir hunters continued to place themselves at risk for punishment. At the end of 1943, for example, three inhabitants of Giessen-Oudekerk were sentenced in Den Bosch to imprisonment varying between three and six months for pilfering items from airplane wreckage.¹⁰⁶ On 8 January 1944, eleven people were arrested in Spijk and transferred to the prison in Groningen only because they had demonstrated “exaggerated interest” in an Allied airplane that had made an emergency landing on a sandbank.¹⁰⁷ After being detained for several weeks, the people were eventually released.

Even more serious, however, were the punishments for ‘pilot helpers’. Fourteen villagers from Westmaas near Oud-Beijerland on the island of Hoekse Waard were arrested on 7 August 1941

after townsmen had given clothing, food and money to the crewmen of a British airplane after its emergency landing. Six of the individuals detained were released after first being tortured. The remaining eight people were sentenced within the week: three received hard labor or imprisonment, and five were condemned to death. Christiansen obviously wanted to make it quite clear to the Dutch public that 'pilot help' would be dealt with harshly. On 14 August he announced to everyone in The Netherlands that some individuals had been condemned to death because they were guilty of failing to heed the repeated warnings regarding '*Feindbegünstigung*' [helping the enemy].¹⁰⁸ He refused to grant a stay of execution and on 19 September the prisoners were shot to death in Rotterdam. It was the second time since German occupation that Dutchmen found themselves standing in front of a firing squad.¹⁰⁹

Two months later, after helping the British fliers named Pape and Moir (see also Section 4.7.1.), four people faced the same fate in the dunes near Bloemendaal. During the remainder of the war, the punishment that was generally followed was that airmen became prisoners of war while their helpers were sentenced to death. The knowledge that an airman would have an easier time after arrest than his helpers drove the resistance worker named Fred Distelbergen to pose as an airman when he was arrested in the presence of two American gunners. He successfully called himself O.J. Hansen and was placed on transport to *Stalag Luft IV* in Grosz Tychow in Pommeren. Although he was constantly fearful that his disguise would be discovered, he managed to survive the war posing as 'airman Hansen'.¹¹⁰

After the judiciary had established that various Allied airmen downed over The Netherlands had already been hidden by the Dutch,¹¹¹ in June 1942 General Christiansen announced to the mayors that enemy crewmen must be found and immediately handed over to either the local police or German authorities.¹¹² In 1942, the Attorney General in Arnhem told the police force under his jurisdiction that whoever found an airman but refused to hand him over to the authorities could be certain of receiving the death penalty.¹¹³

That this threat was not unfounded was experienced by the Dutch journalist named Eduard Coster in February 1944. He lived in an apartment above the Chabot family where airmen from Hilvarenbeek were taken in Brussels. Late in 1943 various members of this escape line, including Coster, were sentenced to death by the German military tribunal in Brussels. Coster was accused of not informing the proper authorities about the presence of airmen at his down-stairs neighbor's home, thus making it possible for the resistance to continue using this important 'transit center' or safe house:

"In addition to the general danger, one needs to remember that the monthly numbers of airmen who had jumped from their airplanes but had not yet been captured was quite substantial. Collecting and transporting them is only possible on the basis of necessary collaboration among wide circles of the population. Thus a frightful punishment will certainly act as a deterrent, especially upon the transit centers that receive airmen."¹¹⁴

The Dutch public was well aware of the risks that they would be asked to take when hiding airmen. When Graeme Warrack, Chief of the Medical Staff of the Airborne Division, was forced to go underground with a Dutch family after 'Operation Market Garden' had failed, he asked their daughter which dangers her family would be facing if they hid him. She replied:

"They would shoot my father and my brothers. Their home would be set ablaze. The remainder of the family would be sent to the concentration camp in Amersfoort."¹¹⁵

For example, in Rockanje at the end of 1944, such threats became a reality. In the night of 19 December, while the home of the Hoogvliet family was being searched, the British air gunner named Allen Sinden was discovered; he had been hiding there for months. Jan Hoogvliet, his 29-year-old son Hugo and 31-year-old daughter Jaapje were taken to the *Ortskommandant*. The next day ten inhabitants of Rockanje were forced to go to the Hoogvliet home. Upon arrival they saw German soldiers already busy emptying the contents of the house. A German officer announced that Jan and Hugo Hoogvliet had earned the death penalty when they helped a British airman and said that the message should be spread among the inhabitants of Rockanje. Then Jan and Hugo, still on their feet, were led by a number of German soldiers to their property. The people of Rockanje felt lumps rise in their throats when Jan and his son Hugo turned towards each other to say their farewells. After that they were tied to two stakes that had been erected in the garden and blindfolded. Hugo asked if his half-brother Cor Noordermeer was among the observers. Cor was not present but no one dared to answer Hugo's final question out of fear that they would hear the command 'Go stand next to him'. Thereafter the execution platoon did what was commanded, and the on-lookers were ordered to *abmarschieren* ['march off']. On the way back to the village, not a word was spoken. Using several hand grenades, the home of the Hoogvliet family was set ablaze. The bodies of the father and his son were left lying in the garden for 24 hours, under the watchful eye of a German guard. Their final punishment was that their bodies were not even placed in coffins. After Jaapje had been released from detention, she discovered that she no longer had a house – even an empty one – to which she could return.¹¹⁶

In September 1944, when it finally appeared that The Netherlands was soon to be liberated, the German occupiers developed an intense fear of 'terrorists' and several times they acted with particular harshness towards 'pilot helpers'. This was the case, for example, in Zaandam where nine crewmen had parachuted from their bomber on 11 September. With the help of the resistance in Zaandam, all nine airmen were placed in hiding. After Rauter had personally interfered, four Dutchmen were executed two days later as reprisal for the disappearance of the Americans. One of the four people was C. Verdonk who ran a drugstore in Zaandam and was known to have hidden one of the parachutes. Rauter threatened to shoot another eighteen inhabitants the next day if the airmen did not show their faces. If that action failed to produce results, then the following day 100 to 150 people would be shot at random from a moving car. These harsh threats broke the will of the resistance in Zaandam and, after first discussing the matter with the police, they decided to hand over three airmen. It was a painful decision which caused many heated discussions among the Zaandam resistance workers during the days that followed.¹¹⁷ On 19 and 25 November 1944, the *SD* in Weerslo executed four innocent civilians by firing squad after a Spitfire pilot who had parachuted to safety had escaped capture by the Germans.¹¹⁸

Within the spiral of aggression and counter-aggression that gained momentum after the summer of 1944 in occupied Dutch territory, airmen themselves were no longer safe. On 2 October 1944, two Allied airmen named Robert W. Zurcher and Kenneth H.C. Ingram, who had been taken underground by members of the Narda resistance group, were executed by firing squad together with six resistance fighters in Apeldoorn. The same day the *SD* raided a house in Apeldoorn where five other airmen were in hiding. The Germans only discovered one American named Captain Bill Francis Moore who had not felt comfortable in the safe but cramped attic quarters. Moore was roughly interrogated about his former secret address but gave the Germans no information. Two months after his arrest he was executed along with twelve resistance workers. Although he should have been imprisoned as prisoner of war after his arrest, he was executed. Moore had lost his military identity tag.¹¹⁹

The widow J.B. van der Wal in Nijverdal had been hiding two people in her home, i.e., her 24-year-old son Bote who had refused to sign a statement of loyalty to the Germans while he was a student in Groningen and a British airman named Gerald Hood. Both men were discovered hiding there about mid-March 1945 by members of the Dutch *Grüne Polizei* [German Police] and the local Marechaussee who had been tipped about their whereabouts by someone in the neighborhood. On 21 March, Hood was removed from the local prison in Almelo and told that he was being transferred to a prison camp. However, near Zenderen he was killed by a bullet in the neck. Three days later the same thing happened to Bote van der Wal.¹²⁰

In total, it has been estimated that 150-165 Dutch 'pilot helpers' died as a result of their resistance work.¹²¹ To understand clearly why some people were hesitant when asked to help Allied airmen, it is necessary to keep this fact in mind.