

‘Pilot Help’

3.1. ‘We’ve got one of them’

*‘Solvitur Ambulando’*¹

If after reaching ground immediate arrest did not follow and if there were no onlookers in the vicinity of the crash site, then the pilot or crewmen found themselves left to their own devices. After first suffering the traumatic experience of being shot at and forced to make an emergency landing or parachute to safety and then realizing that fellow crewmen might not have survived the disaster, these fliers now had to decide what action to take. Should they attempt to escape using their own wiles or should they knock at a stranger’s door to seek help. Such a difficult decision could be further complicated if an airman was uncertain whether he had actually landed in Germany or The Netherlands. Especially after landing near the border, an airman would frequently walk westward until he was certain that he was indeed in The Netherlands where he could hope to receive a friendlier reception than in Germany where several Allied airmen had been lynched after their crash.² With this problem in mind, airmen were now supplied with their own weapons during the final phase of the war.

In England, Allied crewmen had been told that they should hide themselves for at least 24 hours after a crash landing. During that period of time, they could be certain that the German authorities would search for them – sometimes even using tracker dogs – near the crash site or at the location where parachutes had been seen descending. Only after ample time had passed could a flier safely attempt approaching the local population. Airmen had also been instructed to survey the area carefully before knocking at a stranger’s door, first observing the house discretely from a distance.³ However, in practice, this caution was rarely observed and, poised between hope and fear, most airmen simply knocked at a door hoping to find good luck waiting.

Many Dutchmen to whom airmen turned for help were equally wary about what they could expect if a flier knocked at their door – or occasionally even landed on the roof – seeking assistance.⁴ This sometimes led to chaotic situations in which language played a problematic role. Not as many Dutchmen could speak English at the beginning of the war as well as after the war had ended. It was not unusual to hear difficult ‘conversations’ such as “Churchill, Wilhelmina, comrade”,⁵ “Wilhelmina yes, Hitler no”,⁶ and “not enemy, not enemy”.⁷ If an airman asked someone “Are you Dutch” the answer was often a repeated vehement “No” because the Dutchman had thought that he was being called a ‘German’, i.e., the word ‘Dutch’ in English was often confused with the word ‘Duits’ meaning German in the Dutch language.⁸

Illustrative for this kind of mutual uncertainty and hesitation is the story of David G. Alford, one of the crewmen of a B-17 that crashed on 4 February 1944 in the area bordering the communities of Winterswijk and Eibergen:

“Life on the farm belonging to the Overkamp family was thrown into commotion by an unusual visitor. Mr. T.G. Overkamp was first to see David Alford and made it clear that he was in The Netherlands. However, Alford ran away, probably fearing that he might be taken prisoner, and while running pulled his airman’s cap off his head and threw it into a well. ... Still running, but without a goal in mind, Alford decided to hide himself in the ‘Rozenbos’ woods. After hiding there for a while, he decided that it would be better to go looking for help. He hoped that the enemy had already given up their search for him. Not feeling totally at ease he approached the farm belonging to the Bus family where he found help. However, he remained unsure of his predicament because no one at the farm spoke English. A neighbor’s son was asked to help translate which put Alford more at ease. However, there was suddenly a knock at the door, and Alford was rapidly hidden in a bedroom because it could be the Germans. However, it was only Gotink who worked at a garden nursery and was thoroughly reliable. Gotink was informed about the situation. First everyone decided to have dinner but after the meal was over, the elderly Mr. Bus said that the pilot really must leave for he feared the harsh punishments imposed by the Germans to anyone harboring airmen. Some civilian clothing was gathered together and, after being dressed as a labor worker, Alford departed heading westward. Once again Alford decided to hide awhile in the woods. Later, after walking further, he again found a farm where he climbed into a haystack and fell into a deep sleep. Early in the morning when he awoke, he decided to learn who lived in the farmhouse.”⁹

It was the occupants of this farm who finally brought Alford into contact with the resistance. After roaming repeatedly from place to place around the country, Alford finally crossed via Maastricht into Belgium where he was liberated in the Ardennes.

After wandering alone for days on end, almost every airman who found himself in occupied Dutch territory finally admitted that he would never get out of the country using only his own inventiveness. Usually at his wit’s end, a flier would eventually be forced to knock at a door, hoping to find a friendly face. The airman’s fate depended solely on the attitude and political inclinations of the occupants as well as on what type of help they had to offer. In other cases, an exhausted airman might choose to rest in a shed or haystack where he could be discovered at the break of dawn the next day.

Very few crewmen escaped successfully from The Netherlands on their own. One example of someone who actually did escape without assistance was an airman named Jan Bernard Marinus Haye who, parachuting from his Lancaster on 13 May 1943, landed to the southeast of Albergen.¹⁰ Once on ground, he was uncertain whether he was in Dutch or German territory. Because Haye just happened to be Dutch by birth, he decided to eavesdrop at a farmhouse to hear what language was being spoken by the people inside. However, because they were using the dialect spoken in Twente, Haye’s question remained unanswered. Thus he decided to walk somewhat farther westward. At the next farmhouse, he knocked at the door only to be turned away. When he saw a sign bearing the text “Verboden toegang” [entrance forbidden] he at least knew that he was in The Netherlands. After once again being refused help at a farmhouse, he lay down in a haystack to rest. The next morning he set out again walking towards the west, hoping to find a boat in which he could escape to England. After roaming from farm to farm, where he was supplied with civilian clothing and food, he was given a bicycle to use. In three stages he cycled to Amsterdam.

On his journey to Amsterdam Haye learned that several prostitutes in the Warmoesstraat [the red-light district in Amsterdam] were helping the resistance. Once in Amsterdam he tried to make some contact in a bar but had the distinct impression that he was not safe there. When a police car stopped outside, Haye fled into a movie theater and decided to travel to The Hague by train. After first taking the wrong train (to Zandvoort), he managed to reach the court capital of The Hague. By chance, at the train station Haye ran into a teacher and his wife whom he had known before the war. The couple introduced him to Anton Schrader who offered Haye the possibility of traveling by boat to England in the company of several other men. After reaching the open sea, the boat's engine suddenly shut down and the men had to row further. After four days at sea, the company of men was picked up by a British motor torpedo boat. This adventure had been an exceptional success story.

In contrast to Haye's story which had a successful ending is that of the British tail gunner named Ron Roberts who, after having parachuted into the country near Raalte at the end of September 1943, attempted to escape The Netherlands without assistance. His story clearly shows how many uncertainties and surprises were in store for an airman who suddenly found himself in foreign occupied territory. After his landing, Roberts was twice supplied with food and drink at a farmhouse, after which he decided to set off towards Zwolle on his own.

"I passed various German soldiers who were going to work. I had removed all the insignia from my uniform and pulled the legs of my trousers down over my [airmen's] boots. The German soldiers obviously did not recognize me in my Air Force colors. Thus my self-confidence grew – this would be easy I thought. As I neared the outskirts of Zwolle, a Dutchman on a bicycle approached me. He cycled slowly alongside me, asking if I were English. Further down the road as I passed a garage, I heard 'psst, psst' and saw a man beckoning to me to come inside. Some men asked if I had any money on me and I gave them my survival kit containing Dutch guilders. They took some of my money and returned the rest. They said that they would use the money to buy me a train ticket. ..."

Roberts was instructed to walk further in the direction of the train station.

"... From behind a garden gate I again heard 'psst, psst' and a hand holding a train ticket extended towards me through the hedge. As I approached the turnstile at the station, the conductor turned his back and I was able to walk through to the train. I was standing on the platform when a group of German soldiers came along side me. I headed for the toilets where I found a woman cleaning the mirror. When she saw me, her mouth dropped open in surprise. Then she grabbed me, pushed me into a toilet cubicle, and closed the door. Because I had nothing better to do, I stayed where I was, sitting on the pot. Various times the cubicle door was opened so that a Dutchman could shake my hand. It was a strange experience, nice, but not without some risk for discovery. Finally the door opened again and before me stood a man accompanied by a young lad who spoke some English. He told me that when the train arrived someone would warn me to go out onto the platform. I went to the platform when the train arrived. ... The conductor gave me a sign that I should board the train, opened the carriage door for me, and when the train departed various people tossed food into my cabin through the open window." ¹¹

Thereafter, however, all hospitality disappeared. In the train Roberts found himself amidst a number of youths dressed in brown uniforms worn by people sympathetic to the Nazi movement. At the train station in Arnhem these youths handed Roberts over to a soldier in the *Wehrmacht* so that an abrupt end came to his excursion through The Netherlands.

From these stories it is clear that many farmers sufficed to supply airmen with food and drink. Often Dutch citizens who were asked to help an airman faced a real dilemma: should they help find shelter or inform the authorities? When not knowing what choice to make, frequently other individuals were summoned to contribute their thoughts on the matter before a decision was made. If only one person among them expressed some doubt, then the airman would be turned over to the German authorities. This can be illustrated by the experiences of the 28-year-old farmer named Garmt Molenhuis who, while working on the land at Broek near Pieterburen on 9 July 1942, encountered a Canadian who had parachuted from a Halifax the previous night. Molenhuis himself neither spoke nor understood English.

Molenhuis who vehemently opposed the national-socialist movement desperately wanted to help the Allied pilot. He hid the airman amidst the winter barley that was stored in containers on the adjacent property. He told the flier to remain there while he went home to get some nourishment. After leaving the provisions with his protégé and letting him know that he would return as quickly as possible, Molenhuis returned to Broek. "Then I began to ponder the practicalities" he said because his heart was set on helping the Canadian. Then Molenhuis remembered that the blacksmith Doornbos in Broek was hiding a Dutchman named Ko Weiland from the western part of the country who had had a good education and most certainly could speak English. It was merely a matter of minutes before Molenhuis and Weiland were on their way to see the airman. Molenhuis said "They talked to each other for a long time, and the end of the story was that Ko – now a bundle of excitement – wanted to flee with the airman. The airman disagreed because he felt that the risks were too great for Weiland."

Slowly it began to dawn upon the Dutchmen that it would be nearly impossible to 'dispose' of an Allied airman in a country occupied by a heartless enemy if one did not have the necessary network of relations. They returned to the house where Weiland probably shared a confidence with the blacksmith. When the smith surmised from their excited behavior that the men were up to something, he questioned Ko Weiland who revealed their secret plan. Molenhuis said "The smith wanted to have nothing to do with the matter." The end of the story was that the men returned to the Canadian to say that helping him would be difficult and that they had already been warned not to run the risk. The Canadian replied that, since his injured foot would hinder his escape, it would be better to be handed over to the German authorities. Against their wishes, Molenhuis and Weiland took the airman on the back of a tandem bicycle to the German sentry in Kloosterburen. "They (the Germans) were very grateful."¹²

Hesitation on the side of the public intensified, especially during the first phase of the occupation, because the airmen themselves were yet unaware of all the possibilities available for avoiding imprisonment when caught. In addition, airmen did not want to endanger the civilian population by their presence.¹³ Sometimes it was the airmen who insisted on being turned over to the German authorities.¹⁴ Cases have even been reported in which an airman had to be convinced by the Dutch not to surrender but rather to accept the help being offered.¹⁵ Even after offering their help, the Dutch were sometimes left feeling helpless when an airman still refused support. Perhaps this strange behavior resulted from the trauma experienced after a flight had ended so badly. Such had been the experience of the resistance fighter named John Keulen, summoned to help a farmer in Bakhuizen in southwest Friesland at the end of June 1942. The farmer had discovered on his property and taken to safety Richard L. Griggs who had parachuted from his damaged aircraft.

"The resistance worker appeared inconspicuously on the scene and, under cover of a haystack, held a long conference with Griggs. It was June 1942 and the organization that would later help so many Allied airmen escape had yet to be established in our region. Nevertheless, the

underground worker still thought it possible to keep Griggs from falling into German hands. At least if the airman was willing to have a go at it. That, however, was the problem. Griggs had experienced the worst adventure of his lifetime that night. The air battle, parachute jump, and uncertainty surrounding the fate of his comrades had shocked him deeply. Griggs was thankful for the help that was being offered and it made him feel good that people were even willing to take great risks to help him. However, he felt compelled to refuse their offer. Never again did he want to experience anything as awful as the previous evening. He must now not allow the people standing before him to risk the death penalty on his behalf. He found it preferable to be made prisoner of war. He would be acting in accordance with his instructions and would get no one into trouble. Thus spoke Griggs, adding 'Where can I turn myself in as prisoner of war?' The underground worker found it a shame if not sinful to hand Griggs over but the airman stood his ground and they could not place Griggs somewhere in hiding against his will. There was no other choice and with a heavy heart he delivered Griggs to the police station. ..."¹⁶

Later Keulen would seriously blame himself for not having acted more decisively in this case. Moreover, he would later be given the opportunity to help various airmen escape.¹⁷

In Dongen the behavior of two American parachutists who had been taken prisoner of war in Normandy caused much indignation. Shortly before *Dolle Dinsdag*, 5 September 1944, they left for Germany in a covered truck accompanied by four or five German soldiers. Despite the pleas from the local populace, the airmen were not interested in going underground.¹⁸ The Dutch pilot helper named Eugène van der Heijden wrote the following with irritation:

"I can still hear two Americans – they thought that I could not understand them – discussing together whether it would not be better to turn themselves in to the Germans. At least a POW camp would be safer than attempting a risky flight through Western Europe! And to think that I risked my life for these two guys!"¹⁹

In some cases after the Dutch had been approached by airmen but did not know what to do with their foreign guests, the mayor, local police or other authorities would be contacted with the hope of gaining some advice. A Dutchman who had been living between Slochteren and Schildwolde during the war later related how he had discovered an airman at his front door who had survived a crash in the night of 21 to 22 January 1942:

"I took him inside with me. We gave him coffee and something to eat, and he told us that they had been ordered to drop their bombs on Emden. Using his handkerchief he showed us that he had parachuted from the airplane. He pointed first to a little painting of the Good Shepherd hanging on the wall and then to himself as if to say that he was also a religious man. He was a fine, intelligent fellow – I could see that. There we sat. I wanted to help the man but Tamminga, my neighbor, employed a young lad who was about 17 years old as servant and I did not know if the boy could be trusted. I thought to myself: if they find out that I have an English airman hidden in my house, they will shoot me dead. Tamminga thus suggested that we inform the Dutch police. They would have to decide what should be done after that. However, instead of the Dutch police, six Germans appeared."²⁰

Thus the dilemma solved itself. In some regions of the country where many crashes occurred, civilians slowly began realizing that they too would probably come face to face with a flier at some time. An example of such an experience can be shown by the story related by Arie de Krey from

Peursum in the Alblasserwaard who found himself standing eye to eye with an American lieutenant named Purcell Lee Rae in June 1943:

“The farmers in the surroundings of Peursum who were busy cutting hay early in the morning on this 23rd day of June saw the stocky figure of the American walking. They knew that offering any help to a flier could bring great risks upon themselves. Not intending to put their own lives in danger they chased Lee off their land. Thus the airman, who had put his own life on the line for the sake of others, found himself being chased from one property to the next. Each time Lee who by this time had grown hungry hid himself among bales of hay only to be re-discovered. Finally he found some help in Peursum. Before going to work, Arie de Krey had wanted first to gather some slop for his pigs. As he was gathering some beets from his land, he saw ... someone wearing an airman’s sweater and leather gloves approaching him. ‘That’s one of them’ went through his head. Arie de Krey had always thought that this might happen some day and now he found himself confronted with an airman. Fearing that he would be chased from the land again, the airman kept his distance at ca. 50 meters. De Krey realized that he was now being put to the test: whether to give shelter to an escaped airman and whether to run the risk of being discovered any hour of the day. When he looked at the airman whose every muscle was pleading for help, De Krey could not find it in his heart to chase the man away. He nodded to the flier ... and at that moment became a ‘pilot helper’. De Krey steered the flier into a little shed built beside his house. ... De Krey entered his home in a state of excitement calling out to his son who was still sleeping. ‘Piet, we have one of them!’ Piet understood immediately what was going on.”²¹

Apart from this assistance, Lee did not get very far. De Krey’s wife had an appointment that same morning with her general practitioner. On her way to the doctor, she was asked if it were true that she was hiding an American in her home. She decided to share the secret with her doctor who became quite angry upon hearing her story and accused her of introducing unnecessary risks into her home where children were living. De Krey and his wife thus prepared the airman for his departure. Barely out of the house, he was greeted by the mayor holding a double-barreled shotgun and two Germans who took him into captivity.

After 1942, a more organized form of ‘pilot help’ would slowly develop from such incidental and often clumsy attempts to help airmen. ‘Pilot helpers’ or other civilians would frequently go looking for airmen in areas where they suspected that the crewmen of an airplane might have come down. A frequently used method to lure airmen from their hiding places was to whistle such favorite tunes such as ‘Yankee Doodle’, ‘It’s a long way to Tipperary’ and naturally the first bars of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony which was the victory melody played by the BBC.

3.2. Phases of support for Allied airmen

‘Pilot help’ was not an isolated form of resistance. Individuals involved in ‘pilot help’ were usually also active in other forms of resistance. Jews as well as other individuals who found the occupied territory becoming too hot under their feet were also sharing the same addresses used by airmen attempting to return to the free world. Moreover, the sparse links with the free world were not only being used to transport individuals but also to pass on from within occupied territory military, political and economic intelligence to the Allies.

In the eastern and southern regions of The Netherlands, fleeing airmen had been preceded at various addresses by escaped POWs, most of whom came from Wallonia and France. In contrast to Dutch and Flemish military personnel, these soldiers had not been allowed to go free after their

armies had capitulated. After Belgium had capitulated on 28 May 1940, Belgian and French POWs were transported via Eijsden to Germany. Some of these men were held temporarily at a soccer field in a Zuid-Limburg village and several successfully managed to escape into Belgium thanks to the assistance given by various villagers.

The number of Belgians who escaped POW camps was minimal, and only 768 Belgians who attempted escape were successful. In total, ca. 71,000 French POWs succeeded in permanently avoiding German imprisonment. Approximately 230,000 individual escapes were unsuccessful.²² Most of the French POWs on the run traveled through Luxembourg or Elzas-Lotharingen on their way back to France. The huge wave of fleeing POWs only began in 1943. Due to heavy Allied bombing, remaining in German prison posed a greater risk in comparison to escaping to the homeland. Moreover, the chaos that frequently resulted from the bombing raids presented an extra possibility for escape. Soon after the Belgian and French armies had capitulated, the first attempts at escape were already being made. Especially at the turn of the new year in 1940-1941 when many POWs probably felt an added incentive to spend the holidays with their families, numerous people fled across the German-Dutch border. While the first refugees had had to find their own routes to freedom by trial and error, information about these trajectories would later be passed back to other POWs, most likely after escapees arrested during flight had been returned to their prison camps. In addition, after a successful escape, useful information about possible routes would frequently be smuggled in food packages to people still in prison.

Large numbers of individuals escaped across the German-Dutch border. Isolated farms or churches in The Netherlands would be sought out as places of refuge and there civilian clothing would frequently be supplied. After some time, not only POWs from Belgium and France but also Russian, Polish, Czech and Yugoslavian refugees from Germany were attempting to escape through Limburg into Belgium. In the beginning, risks attached to helping refugees were not as serious in contrast to the situation that would arise later in the war. The German occupation forces did not consider helping escaped POWs to be as serious a crime as supporting Allied airmen. During the beginning of the occupation, the German organizations for persecution and oppression were not yet running in top gear.

When 'pilot help' first began taking form, Dutch helpers would only take individuals as far as the Dutch-Belgian border. Under the most favorable circumstances, a Dutch 'pilot helper' might have a contact within the Belgian resistance who could be met at the border. Every airman who would be helped to escape from The Netherlands would have to cross this border, with the exception of the three men who traveled across the North Sea to England in the company of other *Engelandvaarders*.²³

Few airmen had tried to reach freedom by water. One such attempt was made late in the war on 26 November 1944.²⁴ In the company of two men who were known locally,²⁵ Piet Hanzes ('Sjors') Blom, who was a 32-year-old night watchman at the city hall in Drachten as well as KP leader in Drenthe, and F. ('Nico') Wallinga, a member of the Rotterdam resistance, attempted to take an American pilot named Harry Clark (after the war named Harry Dolph) and James Moulton to England. It had been a risky enterprise because, since the spring of 1941, the entire Wadden region had been declared forbidden territory in a *Küstenverordnung* by the German government commissioner Seyss-Inquart. Using a secret radio transmitter in Hoogzand an appointment would be made with England for the men to be picked up by boat. Before the code upon which they had agreed could be broadcast by the BBC – it was never to be broadcast however – the six men were already on their way to 'Engelsmanplaat', a sandbank between the islands of Ameland and Schiermonnikoog. There the local guides left the two Allies behind to await contact. At a certain

moment Wallinga and Blom saw lights but could not agree to whether these lights were signals from an Allied boat. Thus they did not reply. The stranded *Engelandvaarders* waited more than one week without success in a cabin meant to be used by life guards. Their food supply ran out and they became seriously weakened. Blom who appeared to be in the best condition decided to seek help. However, he landed in a gully and drowned. Months later his body would be washed ashore on the island of Borkum. More than two weeks after they had begun their journey, two men from Moddergat came to collect them, returning the airmen to the resistance in Friesland. Both airmen remained in the vicinity of Dokkum until liberation. The resistance suspected that Wallinga had been responsible for the death of Blom.²⁶

What has been said about the difficulties of escaping via the Wadden Sea was also true for the province of Zeeland. Under the above-mentioned *Küstenverordnung*, after May 1941 no one was allowed on the Wadden Islands, within areas of the islands in Zuid-Holland and in the entire province of Zeeland except for people who had a permanent address at one of these locations.²⁷ Moreover, water with which Zeeland was richly endowed remained an obstacle for anyone trying to escape. Bridges and ferry boats were select control points for the authorities.

In 1940, according to RAF Bomber Command, twenty-eight crewmen who had been shot down over Western Europe returned to England. Of these men, nineteen came down over France and nine over Belgium. No one had returned to England after being shot down over The Netherlands.²⁸ In 1941, the British Intelligence Service MI9, which specialized in escape and flight routes from occupied territory, had only noted the arrival of several men who had been helped to escape by a group in Rotterdam.²⁹

The story about a British pilot named Guy Conran who had been shot down over Coevorden in July 1941 demonstrates how little knowledge many well-meaning Dutchmen had during the first years of occupation regarding the possibilities for helping airmen reach free territory.

“Via the customs office he landed at the vicarage in Klazienaveen. From there he went to Assen where he was hidden in an insane asylum. Because some people thought that occasionally British hydrofoils landed on the IJsselmeer, he was taken to Zwolle. The adventure was a failure ... because English hydrofoils never came. From Zwolle Conran traveled to Wageningen and then on to Nijmegen. It was thought that he could be transported further using a German airplane that was on the ground somewhere in the vicinity of Oosterbeek. This plan also failed. ... Then it was decided to capture a German Messerschmitt at the Eelde airport near Groningen. Conran went there but the control was extremely tight. After this plan had also failed, he was hidden in Twente. Eventually he was taken prisoner.”³⁰

Although it was often speculated whether using an airplane to escape from The Netherlands would be possible, during the war such an attempt by a non-Dutch pilot was never successful. However, in May 1941, a total of six Dutch citizens left Amsterdam for England using a Fokker G-1 and Fokker T-8-W.³¹

Only at the end of 1942 did ‘pilot help’ in The Netherlands assume a more structured form. Allied crewmen were being instructed and made more acutely aware that they must strive to return to their airbases in England should they have to make an emergency landing or parachute into Germany or other occupied territory. Thus they were now being supplied with an ‘escape box’ or kit containing a compass, a map of Western Europe printed on silk, £12 in Dutch, Belgian and French currency (e.g., 40 Dutch guilders, 400 Belgian francs, and 2,000 French francs), a small saw, a razor blade, a fish hook on a line, soap, water purification tablets, a match box, a needle

and thread in the color of the uniform, a piece of chocolate, and several tablets of cacao, cream and sugar. The fliers also carried a language card which would facilitate their first contact with the local population. For The Netherlands there were sentences such as 'I am an English pilot' ('Ik ben een Engelsche piloot'), 'Where am I?' ('Waar ben ik?'), 'Are there Germans in the area?' ('Zijn hier Duitschers in de buurt?'), 'I am hungry' ('Ik heb honger'), 'I am thirsty' ('Ik heb dorst'), and 'Do you have civilian clothing?' ('Heeft U burgerkleding?').

In 1943, the extent of organized resistance in The Netherlands had increased. The opportunities for warfare appeared to change for the Germans after the battles of Stalingrad and El Alamein. An increase in German measures taken against the Dutch public, such as deportation of Jews, regulations against students, plans to detain Dutch military personnel as POWs, and especially to forced labor,³² enflamed the spirit for resistance.³³

'Pilot' lines were being more frequently infiltrated by *V-Männer* from the German counterespionage, the *SD* and *Abwehr*. After the autumn of 1944, 'pilot help' was on the decline. This was partly due to increased Allied superiority in the air, and partly due to Allied victories on the ground. In the autumn of 1944, German fighter planes retreated from the western and southern regions of The Netherlands and, in the spring of 1945, also from the northern and eastern regions of the country. The historian De Jong has written:

"Concerning 'pilot help': although further data is not available, we dare to say that after D-Day, and especially after the collapse of the German front in Normandy, the organizations in question slowed down the transport of 'pilots': why would anyone wish to subject the 'pilots' to the dangers of moving through occupied territory when it appeared that the Allied liberation armies would rapidly be entering the areas in which the men were staying?"³⁴

Moreover, reaching free territory had become more difficult since September 1944 after the Allied front line had dug in along the major rivers in The Netherlands. Thus, after July-August 1944, airmen were being kept hidden at numerous locations to await liberation rather than being moved by the resistance.³⁵

Not only Dutch 'pilot-help' organizations decreased their activities during the summer months of 1944 in expectation that liberation was drawing nearer. Allied authorities whose duties were to facilitate escape from occupied territory for their own military personnel began urging airmen and their 'pilot helpers' not to undertake crossing the front lines but rather to wait for the arrival of the Allied front.³⁶ Moreover, when the Dutch railway went on strike, travel by train which until then had been the means of transportation most preferred by 'pilot helpers' became complicated.

In September 1944 the situation changed considerably after the failure of 'Operation Market Garden' which had been intended to force an Allied breakthrough from Eindhoven, Nijmegen, and Arnhem to the IJsselmeer. The Allied front line was brought to a halt by the Germans at the large rivers. Hundreds of 'airbornes' were struggling to avoid being taken prisoner by the enemy and for the British authorities on the opposite shore there was only one choice to be made – these military men still caught within occupied territory must be given a helping hand.

3.3. Traffic cop in one's own house

When organized 'pilot help' became more structured, permanent 'transit' or 'safe houses' began appearing where airmen could be sheltered temporarily while they waited for other lodgings to be found elsewhere, for their new identity papers to be made, as well as for verification of their

identities. At various locations concentrated throughout The Netherlands such addresses had been established, e.g., in Drachten, Meppel, Erp, Horst-America and Hoensbroek. When someone from the Allied forces landed in the hands of a 'pilot helper', they were usually still wearing their uniforms. Thus the resistance had to find suitable civilian clothing for them. This became more difficult as the war progressed and clothing and shoes became scarce commodities for the Dutch themselves. The result was that an airman often found himself in public wearing clothing that had been scrambled together and was either too large or too small. Near the end of the war, many 'pilot helpers' only owned one pair of shoes and one suit to wear themselves. Occasionally a store would donate large amounts of clothing or a local *KP* would solve the problem by robbing a clothing store owned by a German sympathizer. Medical care was frequently badly needed when an Allied airman had been wounded after his airplane had been attacked or he had suffered an unfortunate crash landing or parachute jump.

Members of the Allied forces attempting to stay out of German hands and avoid the Dutch police did not possess the necessary identity papers for The Netherlands. Without them, their true identities would immediately be brought to light during a check. Thus 'pilot helpers' quickly realized that having such papers – whether blank or forged – at their disposal was a necessity. A new name had to be selected and filled in, preferably one that could be properly pronounced by a native English or American speaker.

However, verifying the identity of an airmen demanded the most time. 'Pilot' lines were extremely vulnerable to large-scale arrests. A *V-Männ* posing as an airman could transverse the entire escape route from north to south, thus giving the *Abwehr* or *SD* an opportunity to roll up the entire escape line in one sweep.

'Pilot-help' organizations thus took an intense interest in checking the reliability of airmen. To do this, they began working with questionnaires that functioned as a ballot.³⁷ The questionnaires, created in London by M19,³⁸ came into use in The Netherlands after contact had been made with the Comet Line in Belgium. In addition to questions about the actual identity of the airman, some questions referred to jargon that was typically RAF. Thus, for example, only a member of the RAF would know that the expression 'a pancake' referred to a landing, 'to receive a gong' to receiving an award, and 'wingless wonder' to RAF officers who could not fly.

Thanks to these security checklists, 'pilot-help' organizations sometimes unmasked *V-Männer*. Thus Joke Folmer who was involved with a 'pilot-help' organization named *Fiat Libertas* was able to unmask two so-called 'pilots'. The men were later assassinated by the *KP* groups with which *Fiat Libertas* maintained contact.³⁹

Within resistance groups that did not have access to such questionnaires, a different method was developed to check the reliability of someone claiming to be an airman. For example, a 'pilot' was asked to draw the coast lines of both England and The Netherlands. In other cases, an airman who was already in hiding would be asked to help verify the identity of a newcomer.⁴⁰ Finally, 'pilot helpers' often developed a sixth sense or 'good nose' for picking out a rotten apple in their midst. Much information could be deduced from the clothing that an airman was wearing. Was he wearing old clothing that had obviously been scraped together for him, as necessity demanded as the war progressed, or was he too well dressed. Attitudes and behaviors exhibited by people claiming to be airmen could also betray their real identities to an insider.

In addition, authorities in England were asked to verify that the information supplied by an airman was correct. This was done using a secret radio transmitter or by sending information by land.

The disadvantage of the latter method was that an airman would naturally have to remain at one address for a longer period of time. The slowness in answering questions regarding the identity of Air Force personnel was a real bone of contention within the Dutch resistance. One case has been documented in which crewmen had to be kept hidden in Heerenveen for at least nine months while waiting for an answer about their identities.⁴¹

Any family hosting an airman in hiding naturally had to take precautions to avoid his presence being discovered. However, it was not possible to forbid everyone – especially family members – to enter the house for security reasons. Thus a decision often had to be made whether family members should be informed, and each individual situation was unique. Mien Manders-Beijers from Bakel, who after December 1943 regularly hid airmen, decided not to tell her parents. After Mien had asked her parents for extra cutlery because ‘she sometimes had people visiting’ her parents must have become somewhat suspicious. Obviously she was housing refugees because once when her father dropped by unannounced, he met several airmen. Somewhat confused he noted that they did not return his greeting. Once home he told his wife: “I don’t know what sort of refugees Mien has taken in, but they don’t open their mouths.” When this story reached Mien’s ears she instructed the men to try to be a bit more friendly towards her father the next time that he visited. During father Beijers’ next visit, several of the airmen patted him jovially on the back, a custom that was not yet known in The Netherlands, which made her father again take notice.⁴² Each solution also presented problems, especially resulting from the somewhat different behavior of the Americans.

For security reasons, the resistance preferred to use homes of unwed or childless people as safe or transit houses⁴³ but, of course, sometimes children also lived at these addresses. In such cases, the question again arose who should be told the secret. Some families informed their children while others kept quiet. Shortly after the war had ended, Vicar Van Nooten’s daughter described in a school essay how her family had solved the problem: in a typically ‘cozy’ Dutch fashion.

“It was May 1943. I came home after making my daily bus trip from Zwolle to Meppel. When I entered the room I found Mother, Father and Agatha talking together. They quickly fell silent. Then Mother said, after first urging me that what she was about to say must never be told during the war, that an English pilot would be arriving at 23:00 h that same night. Peter, a resistance worker, would bring him to us. Agatha and I asked if we could stay up until he arrived, but unfortunately that was impossible. Wim and Bep who were my younger brother and sister were not to be told. Mother was going to let the airman sit and sleep in the attic and we were to say that it was now a messy storage area where no one was allowed to go. The next morning I asked Mother what he looked like and whether he was pleasant. Mother said that he had a moustache and black curly hair. He was Canadian rather than English and his name was Arthur Cullam. When I came home that afternoon at 15:15 h, I asked Mother whether I could see him. I had to wait until the tea was ready and then I could take him tea and Agatha could take a cookie.”

The story of the Lelivelt family from Lichtenvoorde clearly illustrates the severe results that housing one or more airmen could cause. Martinus Antonius Lelivelt, who had been born in 1896, was a faithful and socially active Catholic.⁴⁵ Because his wife was German he had already become aware of the political and economic situation across the eastern Dutch border in Germany as early as the 1930s. During his last visit in 1938 to his wife’s family living in Germany, the *Sicherheitspolizei* had arrived unexpectedly to check if he had brought Dutch newspapers with him. Lelivelt who placed great value on the privacy of the home had been forced to experience at first hand how the tentacles of this totalitarian regime reached even into the privacy of one’s own living room.

Moreover, his relatives had already advised him to begin constructing secret hiding places in his home for food as well as people. That would pose no problem for Lelivelt who was a carpenter and building constructor and had a spacious farmhouse. In 1939 he built false ceilings in a number of high rooms that could only be discovered if someone measured the volume of the building.

Shortly after the German invasion, Lelivelt forbid his 15-year-old daughter Mia from following a course of study given in Den Bosch. Martin Lelivelt wanted to keep his family close together during the war. Mia now had to work as carpenter's apprentice because her father did not want to hire helpers during the uncertain period of the occupation. When Martin was asked whether he was willing to open his house for the resistance, he discussed the matter with Mia because he realized that his wife, who supported him in his attitude about the resistance, would be unable to organize and manage such a household needed for this task. Moreover, for security reasons, their employees would have to be dismissed. Mia was proud that her strict father had trusted her with such responsibility and agreed to his plans.

Shortly thereafter French and Yugoslavian POWs who had escaped from nearby Bocholt began arriving. Directly upon arrival, their clothing which might possibly be bug-infested had to be burned. In return, they were given some of Martin's clothing or, if the size was not correct, clothing from someone in Lichtenvoorde. Even students who were forced to go underground after May 1943 were welcomed at the farmhouse.

Strict security measures had to be established. The refugees, some only staying at the farmhouse for a few days, were placed into various categories and must not learn about the presence of other individuals. Thus Mia functioned as a 'police agent' when planning someone's visit to the toilet. In order not to be heard, she moved around the house wearing sneakers.

One contact, a man named Henk Leemreize, within the resistance possessed a key to the farmhouse in case an emergency arose and he must take someone underground during the night. Thus it was never certain how many heads could be counted in the farmhouse when the day dawned. Because American and British airmen were not fully aware how scarce food was, and they were accustomed to 'plastering' their bread thickly with butter and several layers of whatever else was available, Mia was forced to begin fixing the sandwiches herself for the airmen. The *Landelijke Organisatie voor Hulp aan Onderduikers* (LO, National Organization for Underground Help) supplied ration cards for foodstuffs but these could not all be used in the same shop. Because Lichtenvoorde was still such a small village at that time, asking for so much food would attract unwanted attention. Thus shopping had to be divided over a number of stores.

With an eye to the possibility that an airman would have to remain in The Netherlands for a longer period of time, he had to be shown how to eat and drink like a Dutchman. Americans had to become accustomed to eating with knives in the right and forks in the left hand while Englishmen had to cease placing their food on the rounded back of their forks. More pleasant for the airmen, however, was that Martin Lelivelt had to use his own cache of Dutch gin [jenever] in order to teach them how to drink like a Dutchman and the Americans in particular had to be taught that gin should be sipped rather than gulped.

An agreement had to be reached about ringing the doorbell. People from the resistance rang the doorbell twice while Mia's close girl friend rang three times. If the doorbell rang only once, then that was a sign for everyone to seek shelter immediately in the most distant hideaway.

At a certain moment, Martin Lelivelt's youngest sister with her husband and 5-year-old son were evicted from their home that had been impounded by the *SD*. After much thought, Martin decided to take the family in but only on the condition that the boy would not be allowed to enter certain parts of the farmhouse. There was a piano in the house that Mia was accustomed to playing. During one period, a pilot whom they were sheltering would join Mia in the evenings, when the youngster was in bed, to play duets. However, the child was aware that something strange was happening because he asked why Mia's music always sounded better in the evenings than during the daytime.

These types of situations taxed everyone's nerves to the extreme. When Mia's father was eventually arrested in April 1944, the people remaining in the house became discouraged. Mia shook for a week thereafter out of fear and her mother came down with chronic bronchitis. For the remainder of her life, Mia's mother was never again able to trust anyone and she would quiver intensely each time that the doorbell rang.

3.4. 'Rather thirty Frenchmen than three Americans'

Although warm and friendly relationships, that have been known sometimes to span half a century, often developed between 'pilot helpers' and those airmen to whom they gave shelter, the stranded airmen could also be the source of problems and irritations at the locations in which they were hidden. Various airmen were still in a state of shock when brought to their first transit house as a result of the often oppressive situations in which they found themselves. Even without having undergone the trauma of being shot down, some fliers had become overly excited or 'flak happy' – as the airmen called themselves – just from the nerve-wracking experiences that they had undergone while in flight. At their underground addresses, airmen frequently continued to worry about the fate of their fellow crewmen or blamed themselves for the death of their comrades, even becoming quite depressed during the first stages of their hiding.⁴⁶ Moreover, many fliers were concerned about their own families who might soon be receiving telegrams bearing the words "I regret to inform you that your husband is missing after an operation. Letter will follow."⁴⁷

While still at their airbases airmen had been told to follow and obey the instructions given them by 'pilot helpers'.⁴⁸ However, orders were not always obeyed.⁴⁹ In particular, it was the young American air gunners and bombardiers who were often difficult to handle because they came from a country where freedom reigned and food was not scarce. Many of these young men had seen nothing of the world beyond their direct surroundings at home. About the situation in Europe, much less within occupied territory where refugees could not always be comfortably housed, they often demonstrated little understanding. For example, two Americans who had been hiding in Kootwijkerbroek for quite a long time, disregarding the protest of their hosts, walked 1.5 kilometers each day to visit several countrymen being sheltered elsewhere.⁵⁰ In other ways, these two 'pilots' also behaved rather badly. One of the men accused his host of being personally responsible for detaining him in The Netherlands and threatened to shoot "the goddam place" to shreds as soon as he found himself in an airplane again. He also threatened to turn himself over to the German authorities, regardless of the consequences for his Dutch hosts, if there was not a rapid improvement in the quality of the food on his plate.⁵¹ Fortunately there were other Allies in the area who were able to talk some sense into him.

"If food is clearly short, contain your appetite" was one of the lessons that M19 had given airmen in case they found themselves in occupied territory and under the care of a hosting family.⁵² However, opinions varied among airmen about the food scarcity in The Netherlands. Some airmen

interpreted Mi9's words literally and tried to eat almost nothing while at their underground addresses, under the motivation "You all are hungry yourselves and we are still well fed".⁵³

In general, airmen were not so reticent. Two crewmen who had been sheltered in Berkel en Rodenrijs became too much of a handful for their helpers because, at the height of the 'hunger winter', they tried their best to "stuff themselves to the brim" at mealtimes.⁵⁴ Another airman who had been taken to Berkel en Rodenrijs several weeks later even appeared to be particular about the food on his plate.⁵⁵ In Leersum, one family watched with dismay as the 'airbornes' who were hidden in a shed behind their house dumped the bacon and bacon fat, which had been given to them as a delicacy, from the frying pan into the garden.⁵⁶

In April 1944, M.E. Hooijer-Dubois, the 56-year-old owner of an estate in central Limburg, complained about the behavior of the American crewmen placed under her wing who contrasted badly with the large number of men from other countries whom she had hidden in her home:

"It is easier to have thirty Frenchmen than three Americans. They are terribly spoiled and have had no experience. It has also caught my attention how little they know about the war. They just drop their bombs upon a city. I asked whether they attempted to miss hitting a church – no they said – it was just a German church. They know little about Europe and the hardships that we have had to suffer. And we are so stupid, perhaps out of gratitude towards America, to spoil these airmen. I have even done this myself. They are not very civilized, always lying around with their legs propped up on a chair or in the air. Where we have our heads, they have their legs. They are also constantly burping. In the beginning they made no excuse for it but later they learned to say "Pardon me" or "Excuse me". ... The entire day they read and smoke cigarettes. All my own tobacco is gone, and now they are starting to hoard it themselves. The temperature in the room has to be 70°F or the 'gentlemen' are too cold. They don't have much to say themselves. The house is peaceful again now that they have gone."⁵⁷

Not only homes but also underground camps served as safe transit centers through which airmen were sent. Airmen were often brought together in these centers with other refugees, especially students, because they were approximately the same age and the students could speak English. Such a camp could be found at 'Het Soerel' in the Veluwe which consisted of several huts that had been given the name 'Pas Op' [Watch Out] camp. British and American airmen were occasionally taken there. In these camps, it was a welcomed opportunity for refugees to meet with representatives of the free world and to share ideas and news which had been hidden from them for so long. Confrontation with new facts and opinions did not always have a positive effect, however, as shown by the comments of one student from the camp:

"Thereafter began the Anglo-American infiltration. ... This enhanced the gaiety, but not security, in the camp. In place of softly whispered Dutch words, now American obscenities and swearing echoed throughout the forest. We Dutchmen kept our promise to mind the rules and not wander over the pathways but the subjects of the 'free world' thought that such ridiculous regulations did not apply to them. Nevertheless, we learned the newest American songs, heard that the Negroes in America were lazy and unmanageable, were told that we would never get the Dutch colony of Indonesia back, heard straight from the mouths of the Americans that they had fought for victory in Normandy while later we were told convincingly that this victory was almost totally thanks to the British efforts. We heard that these idealists had voluntarily signed up to fight because the job was so well paid and they would have been recruited to fight anyway. With an air of sobriety seldom seen, one of the Americans told us

that while his countrymen found it extremely important to save democracy the loss of the markets in Europe and East Asia weighed somewhat heavier. ... We found ourselves in a somewhat painful position when a German deserter was brought to the camp after turning in his weapons. ... The American and British airmen found the sight of their first German so terribly interesting that they fell upon him *en masse* that night, taking sole possession of the eagles and swastikas from his uniform. They appeared to have little understanding of our hatred for everything German. ... Most of the Americans were too lazy to wash themselves. Some of the British airmen behaved arrogantly and were anti-social while others rapidly gained everyone's sympathy. ... Boredom no longer existed and at times we even wished that those boys would keep their mouths shut."⁵⁸

One can find other reports about the irritating ideas, manners and behaviors of the Americans in camp 'Pas Op'. One of the camp leaders named Opa [Grandad] Bakker ('Oom [Uncle] Chris') has told how an airman peeled potatoes soon after his arrival.

"... Repeatedly he cut off a slice of the potato which he was peeling and propped it in his mouth, after first adroitly flicking his pointed red tongue in order to stick a piece of gray chewing gum against his front teeth. It was disgusting to watch. ... Bonsma had said that the man was an officer but 'Oom Chris' could not imagine how anyone, even using his wildest fantasy, could draw such a conclusion, certainly not from the man's manners. 'Oom Chris' remained as quiet as a mouse and watched with fascination until the American suddenly caught sight of him. Using an out-stretched left hand to salute as Hitler, he called out happily with an American accent that could not be mistaken 'Hello kid, come in'."⁵⁹

In general, the stranded airmen indeed lacked any notion of security which the Dutch public had learned to feel like a second skin out of necessity after several years of occupation. By breaking the strict rules which forbade anyone to walk in the pathways, American airmen regularly endangered not only their own lives but also those of approximately eighty other people being lodged in the camp.⁶⁰ Such was the story of two airmen who had been hidden one night in a building belonging to the Roman Catholic People's Association in Overschie but were found intoxicated the following morning after drinking the wine used for mass which they had found in the church next door.⁶¹

The 'airbornes' stranded in Arnhem after 'Operation Market Garden' had failed were even less prepared than the airmen for the conditions that they would encounter while in occupied territory, and they did not always allow the resistance to dictate their rules. A courier named Loek ('Elsa') Caspers once ran into this problem while transporting a paratrooper by bicycle from Veenendaal to Amerongen. According to the position of the moon, it would be the last night that someone could be smuggled across the water. The man's hostess had promised him a pudding and thus the paratrooper categorically refused to mount his bicycle until he had tasted his pudding, although Elsa warned him that a delay would cause him literally to 'miss the boat'. That is indeed what happened. Thus this stubborn man had placed his host family in danger for several more weeks just because of a pudding.⁶²

There were other Allied airmen who also played a dangerous game of roulette with the lives of their helpers, not because they had so much spare time to remain in occupied territory but rather because they had lost all patience in waiting.

3.5. Struggle against idleness

The long periods of waiting before being moved often led to boredom. The resulting need for some excitement sometimes placed the helpers in a difficult predicament. Once a British airman hidden in Amsterdam by Hermance van de Wall Bake ('Mien Bakker'), who was also a courier for the resistance leader named Jaap Le Poole, thought that he would play a silly joke by claiming that a robbery had occurred in Mien's absence. The robbers had supposedly stolen a pistol and suitcase filled with illegal papers. The British flier said that he had been shot in the hand while trying bravely to catch the thief. The fanciful story led to a conflict between two rival resistance groups when Le Poole accused the *Ordedienst* resistance group, with whom he had previously been in conflict, of staging the robbery. One year after liberation Van de Wall Bake discovered the gun and suitcase containing the missing papers in the attic.⁶³

It was even more difficult a situation when airmen who were bored or lonely threatened to turn themselves over to the German authorities. When this occurred, a new address had to be found quickly where a somewhat more sociable life could be possible.⁶⁴ At the beginning of 1944, a police sergeant with the Marechaussee in the Achterhoek helped an American airman who had already been placed under arrest go underground. To accomplish this, the sergeant had to go underground himself. However, it appeared that the airman was not too pleased with his situation and frequently complained that it would have been better for him had he been arrested as POW. His behavior became so difficult that the resistance even considered liquidating him themselves. However, they were able to transport him rapidly southward instead.⁶⁵ That some airmen could not always keep their hands off the women with whom they were housed sometimes brought extra risks and made additional moves necessary.⁶⁶ It was of great importance to counteract idleness and boredom among the airmen. Thus they were often included in doing household chores such as peeling potatoes for meals, although it took much effort before they learned to peel them as thinly as Dutch housewives were accustomed to doing at that time of scarcity. In the countryside, where little harm could come of it, airmen could work as hired hands on farms. An interesting form of labor was devised by Vicar Louis Buenk in Veessen who had contact with the resistance in Heerde where he lived and was also hiding five airmen:

"The young men were not allowed outside and were forced to idleness. I wanted a therapy for them. I came upon the idea of letting them build a shelter under the vestry. Veessen was situated exactly on the IJssel line. Considering the possibility of gunfire, the assumption was no longer merely hypothetical that the populace would have to be evacuated. And such an underground bunker could function as a meeting place for the resistance. Thus said, it was done. The British airmen worked in complete darkness at night. Keeping to the left with their wheel barrows, they would regularly bump into Dutchmen who were accustomed to walk on the opposite side. This always caused great hilarity. The men viewed their nightly labor as being a small addition to the resistance effort as well as good medicine against boredom. As the sun arose in the morning, they dove into their beds exhausted and slept most of the day."⁶⁷

Elsewhere airmen were also being drawn into resistance work. In Noordwijk, for example, several American airmen in hiding helped to copy and spread the underground newspaper called *Hilversum III*.⁶⁸ For several weeks, General Hackett, who was recovering in a safe house in Ede from the wounds that he had received during the failed attack on Arnhem, wrote the military notes for the little resistance newspaper called *Pro Patria*.⁶⁹

Games also provided some relief from boredom. Hackett, for example, played many a game of chess while underground. An American flight engineer/back-turret gunner hiding in a safe house in Zaandijk from 4 May 1944 until the liberation one year later frequently took part in bridge evenings in the Zaan area.⁷⁰

The problem of forced boredom at underground addresses intensified when, after the summer of 1944, hardly any airmen could be transported into liberated areas. This situation caused various crewmen to test their own good fortune by trying to find a road to freedom themselves since the Allied front was now so near. Such behavior, however, was very risky. Unfamiliar with the punitive measures being taken by the German occupier, the airmen were not only risking their own lives. Should they be detained, their former helpers could also be arrested. Thus the lack of patience demonstrated by airmen was not appreciated by the resistance. When in the autumn of 1944 a number of American 'airbornes' hiding in the Betuwe complained that they had already been waiting for several days to be taken to liberated territory, the Dutch replied "We have been waiting for four and one-half years and you just barely one week".⁷¹ The American flier named Charles D. Crook, who had been sheltered in Zuna near Nijverdal with a fellow Canadian airman, was one of the airmen who set out on his own after part of The Netherlands had been liberated. The resistance in Nijverdal was quite upset that the American had taken such risks. One resistance leader in Nijverdal visited the Canadian, who had remained behind, to state in no uncertain terms that the airman would be shot should he attempt a stunt such as the one Crook had pulled.⁷² Crook indeed had had good luck because he was later liberated in Zeilberg near Deurne.

Less good fortune was in the stars for the sergeant-airman Peter Thorne who had been hiding at the home of the Arnold family in Nijverdal. At the beginning of 1945, he also attempted, against the advice of his helpers, to travel on his own southward. However, he was arrested and placed on transport to Germany. Near Doetinchem he jumped from the train but hit his head against a railroad switch and died.⁷³

Even worse consequences resulted from the impatience shown by a Canadian airman in Swalmen. By October 1944, the eastern shore of the river Maas had become the front line. Thus it had become nearly impossible to help crewmen who were now forced to await further developments on the frontline. When the population of Swalmen was forced to evacuate in February 1944, this situation became unbearable for a Canadian flier who decided to cross the river Roer on his own. He was caught, however, and while being interrogated by the *Sipo* confessed that he had been helped by the most important resistance man in Limburg, namely J.W.H. Frantzen, and given shelter by butcher L.J.H. Kluitmans. As a result of his confession, Kluitmans and Frantzen's wife were arrested. Mrs. Frantzen returned after the war but Kluitmans died in Dachau in April 1945.

The lengthy periods that airmen were having to spend at underground addresses combined with the increase in weapon droppings by air during the last year of the war led many Allied airmen actively to enlist in work on behalf of the armed resistance during this period. In England fliers had been discouraged from participating in armed resistance because their rights to protection under the Geneva Convention would be jeopardized.⁷⁴ However, in England opinions had been changing as the war progressed because, in secret radio messages transmitted during the last year of the war, several stranded airmen were given implicit instructions to help the resistance.⁷⁵ Participation by airmen in armed resistance occurred throughout the country as a whole, as clearly seen in a brief report. British Captain Frank H. Dell, who had managed to reach The Netherlands after his Mosquito aircraft had crashed over Münster in October 1944, became involved in the Achterhoek with organizing and executing weapon droppings as well as with armed actions against the Germans.⁷⁶ For a while in the Biesbosch, a British and an American airman took part both

in armed resistance and in guarding Germans who had been taken prisoner.⁷⁷ In Beek (municipality of Bergh) a British airman, answering a request from the resistance, liquidated an infiltrator in the autumn of 1944.⁷⁸ In 1944 Harry Clark, an air gunner who had gone underground, began working for the resistance, particularly as an instructor in the use of weapons. In Noord-Holland, in the autumn of 1944, the American rump gunner named Arthur F. Brown temporarily participated in the resistance as member of the team from Area XI belonging to the Internal Armed Forces (*Binnenlandse Strijdkrachten*) which was responsible for storing the weapons dropped by the Allies under cover of night. Thus in October 1944 Brown found himself under heavy fire one night during an attack because his group had been lured into an ambush by *Landwachters* [Dutch assistant policemen led by German officers].⁷⁹ However, he managed to save his own skin and, after giving instructions on the use of weapons in Wieringermeer, was 'ex-filtrated' via Werkendam to an area that had already been liberated early in 1945.

Other airmen who had participated in Dutch armed resistance would never again taste freedom. The 22-year-old American sergeant-airman and air gunner Frank E. Doucette died on 19 September 1944 while taking part in an exchange of fire between the local resistance and Germans in Lierop. The same thing happened to the American air gunner named John E. McCormick on 29 April 1945 who had joined forces with the resistance after being kept in hiding in Zoetermeer. The resistance fighter named Jacob Leendert van Rijn who was a member of the *LO/LKP*-Zoetermeer died with McCormick.⁸⁰

In particular it was the paratroopers who had been unable to escape after 'Operation Market Garden' had failed who did not wish to sit twiddling their thumbs. Thus many of these men participated in various armed operations in the autumn of 1944 and first few months of 1945.⁸¹ One such operation would have huge consequences for the local population.

The British paratrooper named Keith ('Tex') Banwell had been taken prisoner in Arnhem but had managed to escape. He then joined forces with a resistance group in Putten where he gave instructions in the use of weapons that were being dropped. The group had planned an attack on a German automobile that would be traveling over the road between Nijkerk and Putten carrying a German official with important documents. That night Banwell would be in charge of a group of seven men and would be the first to open fire on the car as he had had the most experience using the available 'Bren gun'. In the car were two German officers and two corporals from the *Luftwaffe*. The two corporals managed to escape during the attack. Both officers were wounded, however, and one was carried off by his attackers together with the documents that contained information about German positions on the frontline as well as information about Hitler's whereabouts. The kidnapped German officer was first interrogated but later released after supplying no further information. The second officer died shortly thereafter from his wounds. Frans Slotboom, the youngest member of this resistance group, also died from the wounds that he received during their attack. As reprisal, the Germans shot seven inhabitants of Putten 'on the run'. Thereafter eighty-seven homes in Putten were set ablaze and 589 Dutchmen from Putten taken to Germany. Only forty-nine of these individuals returned to The Netherlands after the war had ended, and shortly thereafter five of these people died.⁸² Banwell was captured somewhat later but the Germans were never aware of the role that he had played before the drama in Putten. He was imprisoned in the concentration camp in Auschwitz where he was later liberated by the Russians.

Allied participation in the resistance was not only dangerous for the airmen themselves. They did not always appreciate the havoc that they could unleash by their acts of resistance because they could not foresee the consequences, especially the German reprisals. This can be seen, for example,

in an entry from the diary of British airman Pat Highland who had been hiding in northern Limburg. He had joined forces with the local resistance and among other jobs repaired artillery that the resistance had been able to remove from wreckages of Allied airplanes.⁸³ On 21 November 1944 he wrote the following.

"In the early hours I cut through some telephone cables and stuck the ends into the mud. Four Germans appeared at the farmhouse. They said that the telephones wires had been sabotaged. They said that they would shoot everyone in Kronenberg if the perpetrator did not show himself. Old Jan made me promise never to do such a thing again. I think that my actions were quite stupid." ⁸⁴

3.6. Underway

When everything went as planned, a day would come when an airman could leave his underground address and head towards the south. Sometimes taking leave was quite emotional and often little remembrances were exchanged. For example, in the autumn of 1941, when crewmen William Moir and Richard Pape left their first safe house which was the farm belonging to the Besselink family in Hengelo they received a box of silver spoons bearing the coat of arms of Hengelo. The spoons were intended to be presented as a gift to Churchill. The Besselinks were given ashtrays.⁸⁵ In return, crewmen frequently left souvenirs such as British coins behind when they left.

Making such exchanges of memorabilia was not without risk. It was even more dangerous to entrust an airman with messages intended for acquaintances living in the free world. Such was the case of Mona Leonhardt-Parsons, member of the Lenglet group, who had asked Moir and Pape after their visit to pass along her greetings to someone she knew in London. The address which she had given them later supplied the German authorities with clues to the whereabouts of Mona and her husband.⁸⁶

During a sometimes extended stay at an underground address, an airman would occasionally write his thoughts on paper about life in the air force and the hospitality given him while in The Netherlands, often accompanied by drawings.⁸⁷ For example, the Otten family in Erp who had hidden a total of fifty-one airmen by the time that the war had ended kept documentation with photographs of each airman who had stayed in their home. The material had been kept stored away under the beams of the house. Fortunately, during the war, this collection of data had remained undetected.

The departure of an airman from an underground address did not necessarily imply that one's resistance work was beyond the danger of discovery. Frequently airmen were arrested further down the escape line. Not every airman limited the information that he gave to the Germans to only his name, rank and serial number during interrogation. J. Rekers, a policeman in Heeten in Overijssel, found himself in such a predicament after taking an airman into his home in May 1943. Although he was not personally connected to any 'pilot-helper' line, he had still attempted to help airmen to the best of his ability. Rekers had made certain that the pilot did not know his name and had been convinced that the airman had neither heard nor seen the name of the village Heeten. However, several days after the airman's departure, Rekers found himself again standing face to face with the flier at the police station. Rekers tried as well as he could to convince the police that he had never seen the airman before, while the airman swore high and low that Rekers had indeed helped him. When the clothes and shoes that the airman had been given proved to fit Rekers like a glove, denial was no longer necessary. After various interrogations, the *SD* agent gave up, although his was a closed and shut case. Showing compassion for the young family, he let Rekers go free.⁸⁸

Among all the possibilities for transporting airmen, the railway proved to be the safest. In general, airmen traveled under the protection of a companion. A number of instructions were given before departure. For example, Joke Folmer made certain that her airmen could answer "ja" and "nee" in Dutch without an accent. When an airman was questioned during the journey, he would look at Folmer's hand for an answer. If she extended one finger, then the answer was "yes", but if she showed two fingers then the reply must be "no". Moreover, usually a closed compartment in the train was chosen for the journey. In other cases, the guide would travel at a distance from the airman so that if an arrest was imminent the 'pilot helper' would not become suspect. Such a safety procedure began when the train tickets were being purchased. The tickets for the guide and airmen were not bought at the same time so that the numbers on the cards would not be consecutive should the Germans carry out a check. The airmen were told to take precautions to minimize the possibility of having to speak during their trip. Although a number of airmen who had experienced a long stay in The Netherlands could understand quite a few words in the Dutch language, it was not recommended that they open their mouths to speak in a train compartment filled with strangers. A method frequently used was to have an airman travel disguised as someone 'deaf and dumb'. The German authorities who ran checks during the occupation must have been under the impression that a significant number of Dutchmen suffered from this affliction. In other cases, an airman would act as if he were asleep in the train or as if he were deep in thought while reading a newspaper. In spite of these instructions, surprises could not always be avoided. The four airmen who boarded a train in Leeuwarden provided such an example, making their guide go quite pale. When told to 'sleep', they carried out the order by pulling their hats over their faces in a fashion that was typical for an American taking a cat nap.⁸⁹

Because it was not always possible, especially in areas near the border, to travel by train, the bicycle was an especially useful means of transportation. In particular it was the American airmen who were unaccustomed to cycling. Some men learned to ride the bicycle at their underground addresses – some men even learned how to ice skate. However, when this was not possible, the results, although often unexpectedly comical, naturally caused risky situations. Once an airman who had not mastered the art of using his brakes cycled straight through a German patrol. At the end of 1943, it was necessary to move two American airmen by bicycle from Heerlen to Geulle. The men had not yet become proficient in maintaining their balance and fell off their bicycles a number of times before reaching their destination. To make matters worse, one of the men was well over six feet tall while only small bicycles were available at that moment. With his huge height, large hands and feet, he looked more like a clown from the circus. At one point along their route, the airmen cycled through a village just as children were leaving their school. The children were so delighted by the spectacle that they ran down the street, following the unfortunate airman.⁹⁰

Regularly airmen were transported from Schijndel to the border area by Wim Tensen and Segundo Jorge Adalberto ('Boy') Ecury from the Dutch Antilles who was temporarily part of the resistance in the province of Brabant.⁹¹ One day both men were forced to carry airmen on the baggage racks of their bicycles as neither flier was able to cycle. The airmen were dressed as farmers so as not to attract attention. Nevertheless, the two couples were a strange sight along the way. Tensen, who had a moustache looked rather British, while the dark-skinned 'Boy' could pass as an American of color. At that time it was rare to see other than light-skinned individuals in The Netherlands. Passers-by in Schijndel thus thought that they were observing a black Afro-American and moustached Brit accompanied by two Dutch farm lads sitting on the baggage racks. This confusion led to the occasion being called a scandalous example of lazy resistance workers forcing Allied airmen to do the heavy work.⁹² It was Ecury in particular who drew the most attention during transport which was sometimes advantageous because less attention was then paid to the real airmen during a check. After a period of time, it became too dangerous for 'Boy' to remain in

Brabant and thus he moved on to Zuid-Holland where he was later arrested in November 1944 and shot by firing squad.

Travel by automobile was rather dangerous because few people had permits to drive. Regardless of the risk, this means of transport was also put to use. Thus resistance workers often approached individuals such as *CCD* controllers, doctors, veterinarians, policemen and members of the air-raid precaution agency who due to their professions were allowed to use automobiles. One well-known example for transportation by road was the truck driven by a Belgian named Fernand Dumoulin. A secret hiding place had been constructed in the truck so that Dumoulin could transport airmen whom he had collected from the Sijmons group in Maastricht over the border into Belgium.

3.7. The border crossing

Along the border between The Netherlands and Belgium various locations served as crossing points for Allied airmen being assisted by local resistance groups. As exemplary, the more extensive history of Karst Smit will be related. Smit who was the leader of a resistance group later crossed the border himself, traveling southward to find additional locations along the route where more assistance could be organized. This description also does justice to the central role played during the war years by the *Marechaussee* who aided stranded airmen and other refugees trying to flee the country and cross the border illegally. When a survey of organizations is later discussed, the roles played by other groups will be included.

Karst Gerrit Smit, son of a shop keeper from The Hague, had been a barrage commander in Tilburg during the May days of 1940 when the Germans invaded The Netherlands.⁹³ After he and his men had blown up three bridges across the Wilhelmina Canal they had attempted to flee to France. Finding themselves stranded there, they decided to return to The Netherlands where Smit reported to the *Marechaussee*.⁹⁴ After first being stationed in Woudrichem and Kaatsheuvel, he was later transferred to Hilvarenbeek at the beginning of 1942.

Some time after his arrival in Hilvarenbeek, Smit and his colleague Jaap van Mastrigt were placed on patrol in the border area between Hilvarenbeek and Belgium. Belgian smugglers were regularly being captured in this region because the food scarcity was notably worse in Belgium than in The Netherlands during this period in the war.⁹⁵ Many Belgians attempted trading their tobacco for butter and other necessities with the Dutch in Noord-Brabant.

When Jaap and Karst observed several men hiding in a ditch, their first thought turned to smugglers. After the men had been detained, however, it became clear that they were French soldiers who had escaped from German military prison and were seeking a place to cross the Dutch-Belgian border. Jaap and Karst understood what was expected of them, and they took the Frenchmen to a Belgian village called Weelde.

This would become a border crossing that they would frequently find themselves making and that would be used in the following manner. Between Hilvarenbeek and Lage-Mierde along the Belgian border near Esbeek was a forest covering several thousand acres of land which belonged to the life insurance company De Utrecht. On the Belgian side of the border, the forest ended abruptly, continuing onward as open meadow and cultivated farmland. The border was further delineated by a sandy road running parallel to it. On both sides of the border there stretched a strip of land running ca. 500 meters land inward from the border which was forbidden territory. German border guards as well as the customs police patrolled the sandy road regularly. On the Dutch side of the border, a refugee could reach the border on bicycle or by foot without too much risk of being

seen. When the stretch of forbidden land was deemed safe to enter, then the refugees and their guide would run quickly towards the border. On the Belgian side, a sandy road ran towards Weelde that was located 7 kilometers down the road. There one could board a bus or tram travelling between Poppel and Turnhout. In Turnhout one could transfer to a tram traveling to Antwerp.

After their first experience with the French POW, Karst and his colleagues were forewarned that they might encounter other Frenchmen while making their patrols and indeed they met Frenchmen on several occasions. Quickly a number of Karst's colleagues, namely, David Jonkers, Kees Keurhorst, Huub Meeuwisse, Freek de Pagter and Albert Wisman, became involved in helping people cross the border illegally.

In Weelde, Karst and his helpers found a café belonging to Maria Segers-Ooms where Frenchmen were being given shelter and care. Here the Dutch Marechaussee could obtain information about patrols along the Belgian side of the border that must be avoided. This data was crucial because returning to The Netherlands was considerably more dangerous since it was impossible to approach the Belgian side of the border without being seen.

For several months, it had only been necessary to help refugees on an incidental basis. However, this situation changed in May 1942. Smit received a visit from Bertram H. Brasz, originally an inhabitant of Enschede, whom Smit had met in 1938 through the Dutch Reformed church in Tilburg where he was encamped as sergeant [capitulant]. Brasz, who knew that Karst worked with the Marechaussee, requested on behalf of his nephew Cornelis Brasz if Smit could help Andries Hoek, the Jewish owner of a ladies' hat shop in Enschede, escape across the border. Karst was willing to try but wondered where Hoek would go once in Belgium. It appeared that Hoek would stay with a milliner whom he had once employed in Enschede but who had since moved to Brussels. Her name was Marie Auguste Krauss.⁹⁶

Thus Smit and Jonkers took Hoek to Krauss in Brussels. When asked by Smit if her home could be used in the future as a permanent safe or transit house for people seeking refuge, Krauss agreed to help. Because of her connections at the city hall in Brussels, she could also supply the underground with blank copies of documents used in Belgium as identity papers. Belgian gendarmes would collect refugees at her home, transporting them further to the Belgian-French border. Thus now an escape line had been created from Hilvarenbeek to Brussels. Another development was taking place that would facilitate their work. Karst knew a customs agent named Constant Heeren who was married to a Belgian woman from Poppel, a village located along the Belgian border between Weelde and Hilvarenbeek. Heeren's sister-in-law named Octavie or 'Vieteke' traveled from Belgium to The Netherlands each week where she worked as a cleaning woman. Because she possessed a German *Passierschein* or traveling papers, she could thus function as a courier between both ends of the Dutch-Belgian escape route.

Quickly thereafter a teacher named Eugène van der Heijden became involved in the underground work being carried out by the Marechaussee. Once again Karst Smit would be asked to help an escaped French POW cross the border. The crossing was planned for early in the morning and the Frenchman would first arrive in Hilvarenbeek to wait. Karst asked Eugène van der Heijden if he saw any possibility of hiding the Frenchman temporarily in the border town. Van der Heijden replied in the affirmative although he was still living with his parents and in fact would be using their home. From that moment onward, the Van der Heijden home became a 'port of call' for many refugees.

In June 1942 another development occurred which would influence the work being done by the Hilvarenbeek group. During that period, transportation of Jews was gaining momentum. Thus a Jewish couple from Amsterdam named De Jong-Koster had decided to flee to Switzerland. David de Jong worked in the textile branch and his wife Ré Koster had been a well-known singer in the 1930s. David de Jong knew people living in both France and Switzerland who could help them escape. In Lyon he had a colleague named Jean Weidner who also worked in the textile trade and De Jong suspected that Weidner could help them reach Switzerland. Using a chain of their relationships, Mr. and Mrs. De Jong-Koster also managed to find a way to escape across the border into Belgium. They found lodgings with the Van der Heijden family and Karst Smit and his colleagues helped them across the border – not one coin crossing hands as payment every step of the way. The couple was pleasantly surprised by this altruism because, in Amsterdam, they had heard much different stories about people claiming to help Jews escape. It was in Amsterdam that huge sums of money were sometimes demanded and even then someone placing himself in the hands of a ‘helper’ never knew with certainty if he would eventually taste freedom, German imprisonment or detention by Dutch police. In turn, Mr. and Mrs. De Jong-Koster were not selfish and they fully realized how many individuals who shared the same fate would benefit if a safe border crossing could be realized. After David de Jong and his wife had reached Brussels, they had a letter smuggled back across the border to the group in Hilvarenbeek. The letter contained a telephone number that should be rung from a public telephone booth in the Belgian capital.

Eugène van der Heijden would carry out this order as he seemed to be the most suitable person available for the task. First, he considered himself to be ‘half Belgian’ because his mother was Flemish. Second, it was the summer vacation and, being a school teacher, his time would be his own for several weeks. He traveled to Brussels via Weelde-Turnhout-Antwerp where he then dialed the given telephone number. He was told to proceed to a certain café and be on the lookout for a man who would be carrying the morning edition of a Brussels newspaper conspicuously. After waiting for about one-half hour, the man indeed appeared. He looked as if he had just stepped out of a spy film, wearing a floppy hat with the brim turned down to hide his eyes as they darted around the café searching for someone. When he saw Eugène he approached introducing himself as ‘Verhoef’ and addressing the Dutchman as ‘Mr. Vos’. ‘Verhoef’ in reality was named Alphons Theissing who was a businessman from Amsterdam. Regardless of his much too conspicuous appearance, Theissing had a higher than average respect for security which he later was able to convey to the often inexperienced and sometimes naïve or overly confident youthful members of the Hilvarenbeek group. ‘Verhoef’ was also able to provide money which was a great relief for the group. Until then, everyone had been contributing from their own pockets to cover costs. Because their activities had intensified, the group’s financial reserves had since dried up. Until this time, Theissing had not had any contacts along the border who could help him move individuals from his large group of Jewish acquaintances living in Amsterdam-Zuid to Brussels. Fortunately this possibility now existed thanks to the group in Hilvarenbeek. Moreover, Eugène van der Heijden brought Theissing into contact with Krauss.

In December 1942 Theissing was arrested at the French-Swiss border. It was assumed that someone had turned traitor, especially because a safe house in Brussels was raided and various fugitives detained during the same period. No further consequences resulted.

In the meantime, from the standpoint of security, the Hilvarenbeek group had become overtaxed. Too many people were being transported by the resistance through this border post into Belgium. However, help was on its way from an unexpected source. At the turn of the year in 1942/1943, the district commander of the Marechaussee in Tilburg told Karst that he was aware of the illegal activities carried out by Karst and his colleagues. Without naming his source, the policeman said

that he had been asked to help the Marechaussee in Hilvarenbeek where and whenever possible. Karst told him that it was necessary to spread 'pilot help' out along the border. Karst knew that there was a 'good' brigade commander named Sergeant Major Christiaan Gerardus de Gier⁹⁷ in Baarle-Nassau and he had several reliable colleagues such as Gradus A. Gerritsen, Adrianus Th. J. van Gestel and Henk Niessen. Thus he suggested that he himself be transferred to Baarle-Nassau while his colleagues Jonkers and Meeuwisse be moved to Goirle. The plan was carried out. Therefore, instead of one place, there were now three possible locations to cross the border illegally south of Tilburg. The three groups worked in parallel and remained in contact.

Not only Frenchmen and Jews passed through the border at Baarle-Nassau. Non-Jewish Dutchmen who had suddenly found themselves in hot water were also helped to flee their country via this underground 'border post'. Several of these Dutch nationals were H.P. Linthorst Homan who would later become Commissioner to the Queen in Friesland, Charles Pahud de Mortanges who was an Olympic horseman, and Henk de Jonge who was an agent for the *BI*.⁹⁸

In the spring of 1943, the group took its first airman across the border. He was an American who had joined the RAF as a volunteer. Several days later a second airman would follow. This time it was a Canadian who had been in hiding for three months in Meppel.

Madame Krauss, however, was not simply willing to stick her neck out for every airman. She found that too risky a business. Moreover, the Jews who had passed through her home had paid her well. Allied airmen were not in such a position. Thus she expected Karst Smit and Eugène van der Heijden to pay her several hundred guilders for each airman in the future to cover the costs of forged identity papers. From that moment, the Hilvarenbeek group avoided further contact with Krauss. In the meantime, the group had found an address in Brussels that they could use for non-Allied individuals which maintained a direct link with the Dutch-Paris Line. This relationship was continued.

Smit thus investigated another address in Belgium for airmen, in particular with a Dutch Calvinist minister named J. Maaskant in Tervuren, located east of Brussels. Smit had once heard Maaskant preach and wondered if this church leader would be willing to lend the resistance a helping hand. The minister brought Smit into contact with Elise F. Chabot who was a divorcée. She, her twin daughters named E.C.L. (Charlotte, Lotti) Ambach and Madelon Frisque-Ambach, and adjutant police commissioner Ernest Van Moorleghem who was Lotti's finance were members of the Belgian 'Eva' group that had links with the Comet Line, a celebrated escape line for airmen. The Chabot home located on Rue Lejeune 4 in Brussels became a regular address in the Belgian capital for Smit and Van der Heijden to use. Furthermore, Neven, who was the director of the Dutch school in Brussels, and his wife appeared willing to open their home as a safe house for transients.

Now that Smit and Van der Heijden no longer received illegal identity cards from Krauss, they were forced to look elsewhere. Eugène found a solution for the problem at 'Smits', a shop for office equipment, in Tilburg for which a company in Amsterdam could make the necessary engraving plates. Jan Naaykens, son of a printer in Hilvarenbeek, appeared willing and able to supply the much needed official stamp to the false papers. In his father's printing company, 500 cards were run off the press.

In the meantime, the number of fliers needing assistance was growing. In order to minimize the potential risk for the Van der Heijden family, the Hilvarenbeek group sought a more concealed address to use. Karst Smit found a solution. During one of his patrols in the vicinity of Hilvarenbeek, he had stumbled upon a group of bare-chested lads near an inn named 'In Den

Bockenreijder'. The young men were students from the agricultural University of Wageningen who had gone into hiding after refusing to sign declarations of loyalty to the Germans. Between newly planted young growth in the forest, that belonged to De Utrecht company, they had used bales of hay to construct a hut that was partially built underground. The hideout was not visible from the road. Karst feared that the lads, perhaps lacking discipline, might put themselves in danger. Thus he arranged that they be placed under the supervision of the resistance in Hilvarenbeek that supplied them with food and other necessities. The hole in the ground was expanded to become an almost comfortable lodging. There was a separate hole for sleeping where even book shelves lined the walls. This hole could now also be used for people passing through to Belgium. Later, when it became too cold to stay in the underground shelter, a nearby chicken coop was converted into living space.

One airman, returning from his first bombing raid on the Ruhr and forced to parachute to safety near Dinther in Noord-Brabant, has described how he finally came to the hut after wandering around the country:

"We now arrived in Tilburg, a city in the southwest part of The Netherlands. At the train station I was to meet a Dutch policeman (K. Smit) whose description had been given to me earlier. When I saw him standing there, I went over and shook his hand as if we were old friends who had not seen each other for a long time. ... Thereafter followed a rather hectic and dangerous ride on a motorbike over broad highways, along quiet lanes and narrow sand paths until we finally arrived in the forest ca. 5 kilometers from the Belgian border (estate 'De Utrecht'). We left the motorbike at the edge of the forest and followed a small path that led to an impenetrable spot where a shelter had been built and camouflaged with old pieces of clothing, branches from trees and some old sacks. Six people were hiding there: one Jew and five Dutch students. ... Regardless of their rather primitive lodgings and the obvious lack of facilities, they appeared to be healthy and clean shaven." ⁹⁹

At a certain moment while on patrol, Karst spotted a nervous young man in the forest. It was Willem Schmidt, a 21-year-old student of medicine from Zeist, who had refused to sign the declaration of loyalty to the Germans. He had regularly transported resistance literature across the border for an underground group in Mechelen. A number of the group's members were Dutchmen who had established themselves in the area as seed cultivators. One of these men was the seed tradesman named Zwaan, an acquaintance of Schmidts' father. Karst realized that if the young man could successfully take illegal newspapers into Belgium he might also succeed in moving people. This possibility would certainly give Karst Smit and Eugène van der Heijden some much needed relief because, until then, they had been taking airmen to Brussels themselves. The student, Wim Schmidt, was willing to give it a try, and, after the beginning of October 1943, he traveled regularly along the tested route to Brussels. A fixed schedule was established: people would be transported on Wednesdays and Saturdays. In October 1943, the group was 'offered' an airman by a general practitioner named Aussems in Goirle with whom the group had not previously worked. The airman claimed to be a French-speaking Canadian with German parents. This explained why he spoke such perfect German, reasonable French and faulty English. On the day that he was scheduled to be taken to Brussels, a message arrived from Belgium asking for a week's delay because transportation of airmen from Brussels had stagnated. Karst Smit decided to keep the man in the students' hollow on the 'De Utrecht' estate. Because they had regularly been in contact with Allied airmen who passed through the camp, the students living there knew a reasonable amount about Allied aircraft. In no time they realized that the Canadian knew far less about his own machinery. They informed Smit about their discovery and, in turn, he warned Ernest Van Moorlehem who, being an older policeman, might have an answer to their problem.

Van Moorleghem had been spending some time in The Hague and on his return to Brussels he stopped off at Hilvarenbeek. After speaking with the 'Canadian', the Belgian policeman was certain that he was dealing with an infiltrator in the escape line. However, the group allowed none of their suspicions to show and the 'Canadian' was told that he would be moved to Belgium in a few days. At the appointed time, he was picked up by two members of the Marechaussee. Outside the hut, the 'Canadian' was executed and his body buried. According to the papers that were discovered on his body, he had been a German *Hauptmann*.

This ugly business was a lesson for the group. Until this occurrence, the reliability of airmen transported by the group had not been tested until reaching Brussels where a checklist employed by the Comet Line was put to use. In the future the group would run these checks in Hilvarenbeek.

However, the checklists were not in use for too long in Hilvarenbeek. On Monday, 15 November 1943, Wim Schmidt planned to accompany an airman named Nello Malavasi to Brussels. The day did not comply with the fixed Wednesday/Saturday schedule maintained by Schmidt, but the airman had heard that Thomas Applewhite, a fellow flier from the same airplane that has crashed on 12 November near Heeswijk, had already been moved to Brussels by Eugène van der Heijden only one day earlier. After hearing that news, he requested that they be reunited as quickly as possible. Because Schmidt had no time that day to take the airman to Chabor's house himself, Lotti Ambach arranged to meet the airman at the train station in Brussels.

Early in the morning, on 15 November, Schmidt departed in the company of Malavasi who was the twentieth airman whom he had helped since beginning his work only five weeks earlier. In the tram to Antwerp, the airman caught the attention of the *Feldgendarmarie* from Turnhout when he responded incorrectly to the questions asked by the Germans. Wim had been instructed that, if stopped for a control, he should treat the airman whom he was accompanying as a complete stranger. However, he had not kept his distance from the airman and was also arrested.

After being interrogated in Antwerp, Schmidt was accompanied to Brussels by a German dressed in civilian clothing. There Lotti Ambach stood waiting on the platform. She betrayed herself immediately when she walked up to the German, assuming that he was the airman whom she must meet, and greeted him with the words "How do you do?". This event led not only to her own arrest but also to those of her mother, her sister and three more underground workers.

Slowly the Hilvarenbeek group grasped the importance of what had taken place in Brussels. Nothing much happened during the first few days, except for the arrest of Petrus van Geel who had only been involved with the group when he had occasionally supplied them with fuel. Schmidt had given Van Geel's name in the hope that the arrest of someone loosely connected with the group might warn the other members of impending danger and allow them time to take appropriate measures. However, because Van Geel's association with the group was so slight, no further conclusions were drawn after his arrest. It was not until Saturday, 20 November, that the Germans re-visited Hilvarenbeek. Various people were arrested but Smit and Van der Heijden, upon hearing this news, had ample time to escape.

On 18 February 1944, Schmidt stood before a German military tribunal in Brussels along with the others who had been arrested. The judges showed no clemency. The death penalty was given to Schmidt, to Johan Oudemans and Jan de Koning who had both lived in the underground student hut and had helped airmen cross the border illegally, to Theo Vogels who had chauffeured airmen from Tilburg to Hilvarenbeek, and to Eduard Coster who was a Dutch journalist living in Brussels and who unfortunately happened to be standing near Lotti Ambach during her arrest. Jeanne

Willems, a Belgian who in Weelde had provided a link between Hilvarenbeek and Brussels, was sentenced to ten years in a house of correction. Van Geel was sentenced to five years in a house of correction, and the Belgian couple named Frisque-Ambach (daughter and son-in-law of Elise Chabot) was sentenced to three years in prison.

When the accused were asked if they had anything to say, Schmidt spoke out. This student who had spent the first sixteen years of his life in the Indian archipelago declared that he was proud “to have had an opportunity to contribute to the liberation of our fatherland and Indonesia. And if given the opportunity to begin anew, I would do it again with my whole heart and soul”. Schmidt died in a German prison at the beginning of 1945. Oudemans and De Koning were executed on 5 January 1945. Vogels died on 26 April 1945 – one day after the area was liberated – from the hardships that he had suffered in prison in Siegburg. Van Moorleghem, who had been tried separately and sentenced to death, was executed by firing squad on 29 November 1944 at the Benk airport near Bayreuth. More or less resulting from these earlier arrests, Josephus (‘Jos’) Cornelis Van der Heijden, the father of Eugène, and his sons Sjeff, Marcel and Gustaaf were arrested in January 1944. Until their arrests, they had been actively helping non-military refugees. Eugène’s father was himself arrested while attempting to cross the border. He and his sons Marcel and Gustaaf died in a concentration camp. Meeuwisse and Jonkers escaped by the skin of their teeth in January 1944 and went into hiding.

After these many arrests, the Hilvarenbeek group was definitely no longer functional. In addition to ca. 150 Dutchmen whom they had helped, the group had also transported approximately forty-five airmen across the border, sometimes taking them as far as Brussels. Of the thirty Allied airmen whose names are known, twenty airmen were able to reach England before D-day.¹⁰⁰

3.8. Support from London

In the preceding text, attention has been paid to ‘pilot help’ as it developed in The Netherlands and as it formed links with escape lines in Belgium and France as time passed. In turn, the question may be asked whether any attempts were made from the south to build escape routes towards the north.

The Dutch government-in-exile in London made very little effort to facilitate the escape of Allied airmen from occupied territory. Attempts by the Dutch government in the summer of 1941, conceived by an *Engelandvaarder* named Bob van der Stok, to create an escape line from Spain to The Netherlands had failed. British authorities had not been successful in making radio contact with the resistance groups in The Netherlands that would have functioned as starting points for the escape line.¹⁰¹

Almost two years later, in March 1943, the *Bureau Inlichting* (BI, Dutch Intelligence Office) sent P.R. Gerbrands forth as their second agent. With the assistance of the ‘pilot-help’ organization named *Fiat Libertas*, Gerbrands was expected to establish an escape line for airmen. Although he was successful, in the summer of 1943 he again had to travel to England because no radio transmitter was available.

From July 1943, however, *Fiat Libertas* could use a radio transmitter belonging to another BI secret agent. It was G.A. van Borssum Buisman who had been transmitting messages to London from ‘pilot-help’ organizations in order to verify the trustworthiness of individuals claiming to be Allied airmen. However, for security reasons, radio transmitters could only broadcast for a limited period

of time, and the process of coding and decoding messages was labor intensive. Running security checks on behalf of *Fiat Libertas* thus became too heavy a task for Van Borssum Buisman who also had other responsibilities. For this reason, it was decided to airdrop the British Dutchman named O.M. ('Jaap', 'Webster') Wiedemann into The Netherlands in the night of 19 to 20 September 1943 so that he could take over Van Borssum Buisman's work. Due to a misunderstanding, Wiedemann landed in a different group also named *Luctor et Emergo*, a name that *Fiat Libertas* itself had used in the past. Wiedemann continued working for that group.

All things considered, little effort was exerted by the Dutch government-in-exile. The Dutchman named Jean Weidner who had organized the Dutch-Paris escape line complained after the war had ended: "The co-operation that one shared with 'London' was ... almost nothing; even communications regarding reliable addresses ... through which *Engelandvaarders* had reached their goals, were almost – even after repeated requests – never given."¹⁰²

Criticism of 'London' was not only directed at the Dutch government-in-exile. The British, and later American, authorities who had even more reason to help – concerned with the fate of their own airmen – contributed minimal effort. M19 had been established at the end of 1939 as part of British Military Intelligence, and as an offshoot of the better-known M15, the British agency for internal security, and of M16, the British Secret Service.¹⁰³ The task of M19 was to be involved with escape and evasion, i.e., escaping from and remaining out of enemy hands. Part of their responsibility had been to create escape lines within the occupied territories of Europe through which Allied military personnel could escape to freedom. The agency had been placed under the leadership of Brigadier Norman Crockatt. Personnel in the Western European section of the agency concerned with escape lines – IS9(d) better known as 'Room 900' – consisted of two men named Jim Langley and Airey Neave. Langley had been taken prisoner by the Germans after the British defeat at Dunkirk. However, after he had managed to escape from a hospital in Lille, he returned to England in March 1941. Neave had been imprisoned by the Germans in Calais in May 1940 but escaped at the beginning of 1942 together with Dutch Second-Lieutenant KNIL A.P.T. Luteyn from the POW camp 'Oflag IVC' for officers in Colditz.¹⁰⁴ After arriving in London in May 1943, he was assigned to M19 with the task of constructing a network of 'pilot helpers' in The Netherlands and Belgium that could be activated should the well-functioning Comet Line which began in Brussels ever collapse.¹⁰⁵

After 1942, MIS-X, the American equivalent of M19, had been set up in London. Personnel from both agencies worked closely together on behalf of the escape lines for Allies, regardless of their nationality. In Europe, M19 continued to play a leading role for 'pilot-help' groups.¹⁰⁶

M19 had limited means at its disposal with which to work. The London office, concerned with Western Europe, could count no more than two employees. For a long time, they were not offered the use of an airplane by which agents or radio equipment could be dropped into Europe. Not until the summer of 1942 could the agency send a radio operator into Western Europe. Neave wrote: "Until the summer of 1942 and even afterwards, organized evasion had the lowest priority with the Air Ministry."¹⁰⁷ Indeed, even later in the war, M19 regularly had to fight for its existence and that of the escape lines.¹⁰⁸

As a result of this lack of means with which to function, M19 was forced to use existing lines and trusted individuals far too long. Signals concerning infiltration or treachery had to be overlooked out of necessity, namely, the existing lines could hardly be closed down.¹⁰⁹

In their memoirs about M19, Langley and Neave wrote that almost no airmen returned from The Netherlands until after 1943.¹¹⁰ Darling also wrote that, for a long time, The Netherlands remained “a knotty problem” for M19.¹¹¹

At the beginning of 1943, M19 seriously began attempting to solve this problem. On 15 January 1943, on behalf of the Comet Line, an agent named André Decat was parachuted into Belgium with the specific task of organizing a line of communications between Belgium and The Netherlands. However, after only a few weeks, Decat was shot to death under dubious circumstances that were never clarified.¹¹²

In February 1943, with the help of an agent, M19 attempted to create an escape line from The Netherlands. In order to do this, 31-year-old Beatrix A.W.M. (‘Felix’, ‘Henriette van der Velde’) Terwindt was called to help. Before the war she had been a stewardess for KLM.¹¹³ During the second year of occupation, she had escaped from The Netherlands and, after a journey through Switzerland, Spain and Portugal that had lasted six months, she finally had reached England. There she went into training with the Special Operations Executive (SOE), a secret agency established in Great Britain in 1940 in order to lend support for the establishment of resistance organizations within the European mainland. M19 that was greatly in need of an agent who could be sent to help establish an escape line from The Netherlands to Brussels, where the Comet Line began, set aside its principle never to use an agent from another intelligence agency. The need to send Terwindt became even more urgent when, at the beginning of 1943, the Comet Line was faced with a series of arrests that threatened to close it down.

The decision to use an agent from SOE was unfortunate. Since the spring of 1942, secret agents from this organization had regularly fallen into German hands after the German counterespionage had successfully begun playing cat-and-mouse via radio messages with their British counterparts – the so-called *Englandspiel* or ‘game’. Time and again the German counterespionage knew in advance where and when the SOE would be dropping their Dutch agents. Thus Trix Terwindt, who was the first woman to be dropped over The Netherlands, also fell prey to a ‘welcome committee’ composed of German authorities and their Dutch traitors when she parachuted into Steenwijk. As a result of the *Englandspiel*, fifty-four agents who had been dropped into The Netherlands lost their lives. Trix Terwindt is among the few individuals who survived this game of espionage.

Another victim of this operation was 35-year-old C.Th.J. (‘meneer [Mr.] Kees’) Smit from the Smit Bally shoe store located in the Venestraat in The Hague. Early in 1942, a Belgian Jonkheer named Jean (‘monsieur Jean’) de Santis de Fryenon had approached Smit asking if he could help track down, care for and transport Allied airmen to safety. It was never known from whom this request had originated, although Smit suspected that it had come from an Englishman whom he had met in Switzerland before the war. Smit had proved to be willing and collected a group of three individuals for this purpose. The group was unsuccessful in finding airmen although they were able to transport espionage intelligence into Brussels.

Terwindt had been given Smit’s address by M19 because she might eventually be able to use him when setting up an escape line. When ‘Felix’ Terwindt fell into the hands of her welcome committee but did not yet realize that they worked for the Germans, she supplied them with Smit’s address. This led to his arrest. The shoe tradesman kept silent during his interrogation long enough for his companions to go underground. Nevertheless, the SD was able to arrest them several weeks later. Wim Okhuysen was the only person to survive this ordeal.

M19 did not become despondent in the face of these setbacks. In the summer of 1943, Langley recruited Major Patrick J.S. Windham-Wright as his specialist for The Netherlands. M19 also contacted the Dutch *BI* about sending a new agent to organize a 'pilot' escape line. They found as agent Dignus ('Dick') Kragt who had been born in 1917 of a Dutch father and British mother.¹¹⁴ In the night of 23 to 24 June 1943, Dignus parachuted into The Netherlands between Epe and Vaassen. Unfortunately, his radio sender went missing during the jump. Later, however, he was able to use the radio equipment belonging to Dirk Last who was the radio operator working for Van Borssum Buisman. In contrast to the methods used by SOE, the *BI* did not work with welcome committees but rather allowed their agents to be dropped 'blindly' into Europe. However, Kragt, whose alias was 'Frans Hals' [a famous Dutch painter], was given the address of his first contact who was J.J. ('Koos') van den Boogert, a distributor with the civil service in Emst, who was already known in England as someone who had been helping Jews go underground.

Via Van den Boogert, Kragt came into contact with the *LO*, the National Organization for Help for Refugees, as well as with Nel Lind who was affiliated with *Fiat Libertas* and later with Joseph ('Joop van Amstel') Piller who was a Jew from Amsterdam.¹¹⁵ Even before the German occupation, Piller had been helping political refugees, including foreign communists, escape the Third Reich. After the German invasion, he had managed to avoid falling victim to the anti-Jewish measures by using false papers that allowed him to travel freely. In this way, Piller was able to offer his services and help numerous Jews go underground. To do this, he also used his vacation house located in the Veluwe. After Van den Boogert had been arrested in October 1943 – he would be executed by firing squad 10 months later – Kragt and Piller exchanged their underground address in Emst for a hideout in Barneveld where they set up an organization called 'Frans Hals'.

The Kragt/Piller group consisted of about ten people.¹¹⁶ Every morning members of the group met in the grocery store belonging to Evert and Maria Gijsberta Bruinekreeft-van der Wiel in Kootwijkerbroek to discuss their plans. This was also a transit address for airmen and later would be used for 'airbornes'. Moreover, Evert was a postman so that he would not attract attention when passing messages or, in reverse, when members of the resistance and refugees would frequent his shop that also served as post office. Elbert van der Wiel, who was Marie Bruinkreeft's father, was the village policeman and in this function could easily accompany anyone over the street without question. From the grocery store meat could be distributed to underground addresses. Kragt remained active up until liberation and was one of the two secret Dutch agents who successfully remained active for two years.

Considerably less success was to befall another agent, the 34-year-old Jewish Dutchman named Maurits Kiek, dropped by M19 a few weeks after Kragt. In 1940 he had owned a factory in Belgium but had fled to England via Switzerland in 1942. Soon after the *BI* had been established, Kiek made it known that he wanted to be sent back into occupied territory. The leadership at the *BI*, fearing that a Jewish agent would encounter too many problems in occupied territory, refused to recruit him as agent. However, M19 had no such reservation about this issue. Thus in mid-July 1943, the Belgian Charles Guelette and Dutch radio-operator Maurits Kiek were dropped into Northern France with instructions similar to those that had been given to the unfortunate Decat earlier that same year. From France, Kiek traveled to The Netherlands where he managed to contact Kragt. He built up his own 'pilot' escape line through which several tens of Allied military personnel were able to escape.¹¹⁷ Because several of these men had spoken indiscriminately about their experience, Kiek was arrested by the Germans in September 1943. He was condemned to death but his execution was delayed because the German *Geheime Feldpolizei* wished to interrogate him further. This never came about, however, and Kiek was moved from one German prison to

the next until he was liberated in Amberg in April 1945. However, after his radio operator had been arrested, Guelette was unable to continue his resistance work.

3.9. Paratroopers and the crossings

In the autumn of 1943, Intelligence School No. 9 (Western European Area) – called IS9 (WEA) – was created from the British M19 and American MIS-X agencies. This organization had been placed under the command of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) of General Eisenhower. It was intended that this organization would operate within liberated territory after the Allied invasion of Western Europe had taken place. Heading the agency were Langley and the American Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Nelson. The personnel working for this newly formed organization was one-half British and one-half American. They also worked closely with the Special Air Service (SAS) to concentrate groups of Allied airmen, and later paratroopers, behind enemy lines to await liberation.

In the night of 15 September 1944, the SAS dropped several men above the Veluwe in The Netherlands. They were the Belgian Captain Gilbert-Sadi ('Captain King', 'Fabian King') Kirschen and three of his countrymen, Regner, Pietquin, and John Moyse who was a radio operator.¹¹⁸ Their order was to report on troop movements between Utrecht and the eastern and southern areas of The Netherlands, on targets for bombers, and on locations where German V2s were being launched. The men were awaited by a welcome committee from the *Raad van Verzet* (Council for Resistance) and quickly made contact with engineer P.C. ('Piet van Arnhem') Kruijff who was leader of the resistance in Arnhem and Roelof Valkenburg who was a medical student. Kirschen and his men had been kept in the dark about the fact that, on 17 September 1944, a massive air offensive called 'Operation Market Garden' had been planned to take place in Noord-Brabant near Nijmegen and Arnhem. At the same time, a ground offensive would advance from Belgium in the south along the trajectory Eindhoven-Grave-Nijmegen-Arnhem. It was imperative that the ground troops reach the Allied troops landing near Arnhem as rapidly as possible. However, this plan failed and only one week after the struggle had begun, the operation at Arnhem had to be halted. In the night of 25 to 26 September, the remainder of the 'airbornes' withdrew across the Rhine. However, rather than being over, Kirschen's task was just beginning.

Many wounded men and their care-givers had been left stranded on the right bank of the river Rhine. Although large numbers of Allies had been taken to POW camps, hundreds of their comrades at arms had managed to escape from their difficult positions, sometimes after temporary imprisonment, and were trying to avoid capture within the occupied territories. Members of resistance groups in Arnhem, Bennekom, Ede, and Lunteren took many of these Allies to safe places.¹¹⁹ Such a location, for example, was the farm called 'Het Nieuwe Erf' located on the Postweg near Lunteren. It was owned by Mina Heij and her husband Aart Roelofsen who, as member of the *KP*, was accustomed to hiding tens of 'airbornes'. The brothers Paul and Zwerus de Nooij played a leading role in helping paratroopers who needed to go into hiding. They had also been involved in hiding the 34-year-old Brigadier General J.W. Hackett who had commanded the Fourth Brigade of paratroopers.¹²⁰ During the battle at Arnhem, he had been wounded by shrapnel from exploding grenades that had penetrated his abdomen in more than ten places. After undergoing surgery successfully in the Sint Elisabeth Gasthuis [hospital] in Arnhem, he was liberated from the hospital by Kruijff and placed in hiding with the four sisters De Nooij in the Torenstraat in Ede. There he remained, aside from several lapses, until 29 January 1945.¹²¹ Dieuwke ('Edith') Nijhoff from Ede, who was also a member of the resistance, helped Allied airmen escape either imprisonment or their temporary hiding places in the forest surrounding Heelsum and Renkum and move on to underground addresses organized by the resistance. Wearing a nurse's

uniform as camouflage, she transported the airmen under bales of burlap sacks in the back of a horse-drawn wagon.

Caring for such huge groups of refugees placed great demands on the local resistance for which the number of women and young girls who had been recruited was relatively large. The following story related by G. Welbedacht illustrates such a situation:

"In 1944 after the air landing Dick [a courier from Ede] and I found ourselves involved with a large group of English paratroopers. ... They had been taken to a sheep's pen near Lunteren. The two of us cooked for these soldiers in a pig's sty where the pigs were still being kept. A section of the stables at a farm nearby had been supplied with cooking kettles ... those pots were heavy too. In these kettles we cooked the meat. It had been obtained from cows that had been killed in the fields by pieces of shrapnel. 'Rinus' collected the bread. It was soggy, brown and difficult to cut. We got blisters on our hands from trying ... We also cooked for a couple of so-called 'evacuees' who dropped by each day to collect their food. This was done to disguise our other activities."¹²²

Kirschen was now given the task of finding paratroopers who had been trapped. He operated from a chicken coop belonging to Jan Evers near Ederveen until it burned to the ground. Thereafter he worked from a large chicken barn belonging to farmer Wuf Lagerweij in a hamlet named De Glind to the north of Scherpenzeel. Two or three times each day he made radio contact with England so that he was able to verify the personal details given by individuals who came to his chicken barn claiming to be paratroopers.

In this way, a Canadian Lieutenant named Leo Heaps made himself known. He would be one of the first men for whom an escape to liberated territory could be organized. Together with two other people, he was taken by bicycle via Langbroek and Maurik to Tiel by both Bep Labouchere, who was engaged to Roelof Valkenburg, and Jan ('Piet de Springer') de Bloois, who was a Dutch agent dropped from England. On 5 October 1944, they were rowed across the river Waal from Tiel by Piet ('Piet Betuwe') Oosterlee who had been a medical student from Groningen. In order to organize this route better, Captain Peter Baker from IS9 crossed the Waal with an American paratrooper named Bachenheimer who came from the already liberated south. On 16 October, the men had gathered together with several members of the resistance in the home of the Ebbens family who were fruit traders in Zoelen. There they awaited the arrival of a group of underground workers who would be bringing weapons and further instructions for Baker.¹²³ Suddenly the Germans raided the house after being informed by a traitor about the underground meeting that was taking place. Everyone present was taken away and imprisoned. Somewhat later when a second group of underground workers arrived, gun fire was exchanged with some Germans who had remained behind in the house. After one of their sentries had been killed, the Germans set the house ablaze in anger. Ebbens assumed full responsibility so that the remainder of the Dutch detainees were rapidly released. Ebbens himself was later executed by firing squad in Renswoude. Baker and Bachenheimer were transported to a German prison. While attempting to jump from the moving train, the American Bachenheimer was shot and killed. Only several days later, Piet Oosterlee also met his end. On 22 October while he and a friend were busy preparing a rubber boat for a crossing in order to take information about German positions to the Allies they were surrounded by a German patrol. During his interrogation in Tiel, Oosterlee tried to escape by jumping through the window. The Germans shot him to death on the street.¹²⁴

During this period, admittedly, various paratroopers successfully managed to cross the major rivers with the help of individual Dutch men and women, but the numbers of Allies – at least several

hundred – still hiding underground in the Veluwe were too large to transport in small groups. At the same time, it was evident that caring for so many military personnel in hiding over a longer period of time would be nearly impossible. The risk for security was too great. Moreover, there was insufficient clothing and food, and too few underground addresses were available to hide airmen for longer periods.

In the meantime, Airey Neave from MI9 had traveled to the Dutch territory that had already been liberated in order to supervise the exfiltration of airmen and paratroopers from the regions of the country still under occupation. He decided to attempt a large rescue operation that was to take place between Sunday night and Monday morning on 22 to 23 October 1944. The operation was named 'Pegasus' after the emblem of the British First Airbourne Division.¹²⁵ Majors Airey Neave and Hugh Fraser from MI9 had made radio contact with Kirschen's group which, in turn, maintained communication with the British Major Digby Tatham Warter and Brigadier General Gerald W. Lathbury who were in hiding in Ede. Lathbury, commander of the First Brigade of paratroopers, had been wounded during the battle of Arnhem but had later escaped from the Sint Elisabeth Gasthuis. Lathbury had his own ideas about an organized escape and sent Lieutenant-Colonel David T. Dobie, commander of the First Para-Batalion, across the Rhine and the Waal rivers to meet with Neave and arrange a plan.

Tatham Warter was made leader of the group of evacuees who, with the help of Piet Kruijff and D. ('Bill') Wildeboer from the resistance groups in Arnhem and Ede, had been gathered together in an out-of-the-way sheep's pen located in a meadow belonging to farmer Gijs Janssen in Ede. These 'airbornes' were to be joined by another group of paratroopers under the command of Major Tony Hibbert in a hideout in Oud-Reemst about 6 kilometers from Ede. Having joined forces, the group would then attempt reaching the Rhine slightly west of Renkum where they would be picked up in little boats sent from the other side of the river. The operation was planned to take place simultaneously with the evacuation of Bennekom so that the Germans would not likely be focussing their attention on a group of trapped Allies trying to escape. The operation was a success and more than 130 Allied military personnel, including at least twenty airmen, crossed the river Rhine.¹²⁶

After the success of this operation, it was decided to attempt a second escape. Neave allowed Kragt to make most of the preparations. Moreover, on 16 October, MI9 had dropped a 28-year-old Dutchman named Abraham ('Ham', 'Arnold', 'Martien') de Bois together with his 20-year-old Belgian radio operator named Raymond André ('Bacon', 'Pieter') Holvoet near Garderen with the orders to organize further exfiltrations. However, their activities were not blessed, and one day after they had been dropped their radio transmitter broke down. Holvoet, who had earlier parachuted into Belgium and France and had successfully carried out his mission, was arrested in The Netherlands after one and one-half weeks. However, De Bois was allowed to use the radio equipment belonging to Moyse who was Kragt's radio operator. On 1 December, De Bois himself was arrested after he had been entrapped by a Dutch SD agent named Johnny de Droog who had gained his trust by promising to help free Holvoet. De Bois was executed by firing squad on 8 March 1945 near Woeste Hoeve. About one month later, Holvoet himself was executed by German firing squad near Zwolle.¹²⁷

The second massive crossing that had been scheduled to take place in the night of 17 to 18 November 1944 had to be moved further northward because the Germans had become more alert and the southern rim of the Veluwe had become forbidden territory. Kragt and Piller considered the operation now impossible to carry out but Neave could not be dissuaded. All Allies hiding in Utrecht, the Veluwe and the Achterhoek and whose secret locations were known to the resistance

would be gathered together in Ede. Approximately 120 people met in the night of 15 to 16 November 1944 in the chicken coops belonging to the brothers Wolfswinkel located on the Meulunterseweg in Lunteren. The plan was as follows. The group would split up into four teams: a staff group as vanguard, a group of doctors accompanied by some Dutchmen, a group of British and American airmen, and finally a group of paratroopers. With the help of guides from local resistance groups, the teams would move under cover of night from Lunteren to a location in Ede where they would re-unite. From Ede they would proceed again the following night towards the river where a flare would be lit as signal. Upon seeing this sign, little boats would be launched from the opposite river bank to collect the evacuees. However, during the last leg of their journey, the men were quite noisy. As one participant later related: "The sounds surrounding me reminded me of a group of baby elephants clearing a path through the jungle."¹²⁸

While crossing the Arnhem-Ede-Amsterdam highway, the collective group had already begun to scatter. When an American airman accidentally fired his Sten gun, the incident was immediately answered by German artillery so that the confusion was complete. A heavy gun battle ensued in which it was difficult for the Allies to tell who was friend or foe. The men rushed off in all directions, losing track of their Dutch guides. During the nights that would follow, only seven people including two airmen would eventually reach the other side of the Rhine safely.¹²⁹ Tens of people were either missing or dead. Other people turned themselves in at the *Feldgendarmarie* in Ede. Their Dutch guides were tortured badly before being executed later as *Todeskandidaten*.

After the second Pegasus operation had failed, there were still about sixty 'airbornes' hiding in the Veluwe whose underground addresses were known by Kragt and Piller. It was assumed that other Allies were still hiding somewhere in the Veluwe at unknown locations. In order to locate these individuals and bring them to safety, working together the Dutch *BI* and *M19* dropped six agents into the country between December 1944 and March 1945. These men were I. ('Buurman') de Groot, Van Westen, Boon, Witjes, Van der Tuin, and Staring. Van der Tuin did not complete his mission successfully. Witjes' task in particular was to transmit military messages from occupied territory. De Groot, Van Westen and Boon, who had been dropped in December, crossed the river Waal numerous times to guide the Allies. Van Westen continued working until January 1945 and De Groot until 14 March 1945. Boon was active until liberation and transmitted numerous messages.¹³⁰

In the meantime, De Bloois continued his activities. After his successful trip with Heaps, De Bloois continued transporting small groups of paratroopers via bicycle along the same route. It was necessary to cross the Rhine somewhere between Amerongen and Maurik which was not an easy task considering the depth of the water there and the formation of ice on the river in the winter of 1944-1945. In crossing the river Rhine, 'Piet de Springer' was assisted by the river guides named Chris Cornelisse and Gerrit Herman ('Coen') Esveld. Some airmen were temporarily placed in hiding in Leersum in the home of a student named Thom Bakker and his wife Adri. On the other side of the river in Maurik, the home of the Kok family functioned as safe house. It has been estimated that approximately twenty 'airbornes' were transported along this route.¹³¹ On 1 January 1945, the activities of 'Piet de Springer' abruptly came to a halt when he was arrested in Langbroek while carrying important documents. When he attempted to escape, he was shot and killed. Because no one in Langbroek knew his real name (Jan de Bloois) his parents could not be informed about the tragic death of their son until May 1945. This route could no longer be used. In January 1945, heavy battles were taking place in the Betuwe which made it impossible to transport paratroopers throughout this region.

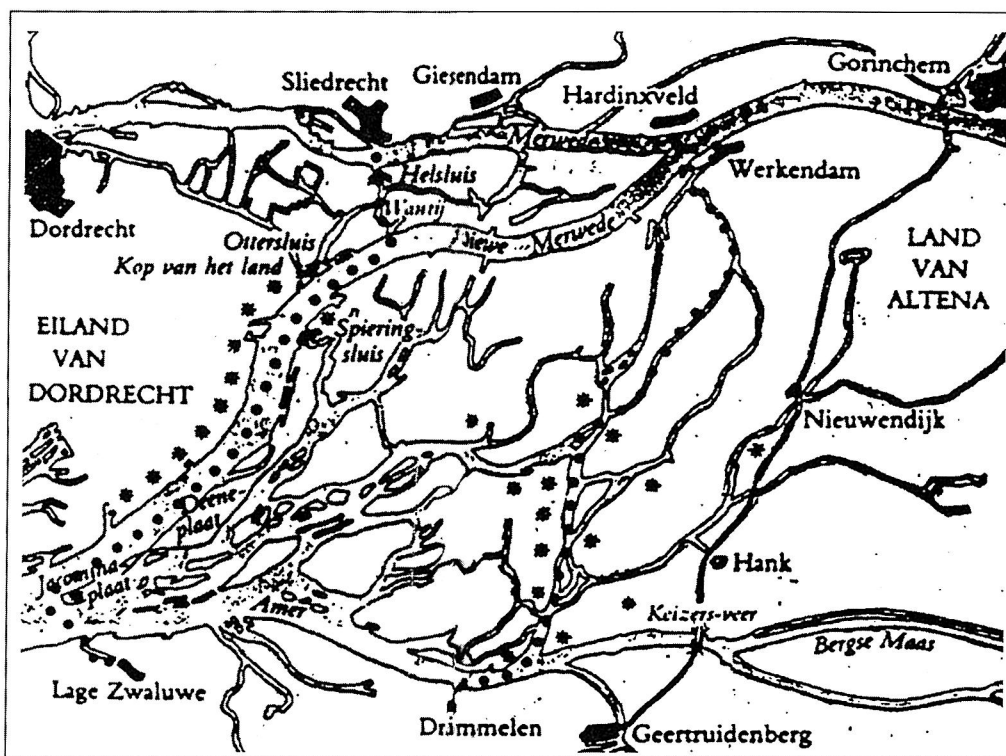
It was not only in and around the Veluwe that many paratroopers and airmen found themselves stranded after 'Operation Market Garden' had failed. Around the countryside gliders had also landed at wrong locations during the first days of the operation. For example, in Den Dungen, a few passengers from a glider had to hide themselves for over one week in an open field and haystacks until they eventually succumbed to hunger and decided to knock at the door of a farmhouse. Thereafter the three military men were given a place to hide that was just as safe as it was confining: a concrete sewage pipe that had been buried in the ground. It was without any incidence of light, had minimal ventilation, was 5-6 meters in length and only 1.5 meters in diameter. These men remained in the pipe for five days. Fortunately, they could later be hidden in a shed for several weeks until Den Dungen was liberated and they could rejoin their divisions.¹³²

Much more gruesome were the conditions experienced on Schouwen-Duiveland by the passengers of two gliders that had flown off course and crashed. All thirty passengers from the first glider and three from the second glider surrendered directly to the German authorities. Three other passengers – two British fliers and a Dutch commando named Herman de Leeuw – succeeded in linking up with the local resistance which had been in contact since October with Canadians on Sint-Philipsland. They had been discussing the possibility of staging a revolt against the Germans by the Armenians who were stationed on Schouwen-Duiveland. The plan came under pressure when the Germans announced at the beginning of December 1944 that all men between the ages of 17 and 40 years would be removed from the island and placed in forced labor elsewhere. It was thus decided that thirteen members of the resistance, an Armenian, De Leeuw and both British glider crewmen must be picked up by a British landing craft. However, the rendezvous at the sea wall near Zierikzee failed twice. Upon returning from the second failed attempt, the group encountered a German patrol. Both airmen, the commando and three of the resistance fighters managed to escape while the rest of the group was taken prisoner. One man was seriously wounded during his arrest and thus left behind at the hospital in Zierikzee. The Germans took the remaining detainees by boat to Goeree-Overflakkee. Underway the Armenian jumped from the boat and drowned. The other men, after being badly tortured and hastily sentenced, were hanged on 10 December at castle Moermond in Renesse. After the man who had been hospitalized died on 11 December, his lifeless body was hung alongside his dead comrades-in-arms who, upon German command, were left hanging for 24 hours. The next of kin and five citizens from each community on Schouwen-Duiveland were forced to pass by and view the dead bodies. The airmen were able to keep themselves hidden for awhile before being discovered by some villagers who turned them over to the Germans, fearful of the harsh punishments that the Germans had promised to inflict on the villages should the escapees not be found.¹³³

At the end of 1944, Kirschen and Kragt were able to make contact with a resistance group that had helped 'airbornes' cross the river Lek near Groot-Ammers. Some of the members of the 'Lek' team – also called the 'pilot team' – were Dick van Brugge, Map Dogterom who was a courier, Kars van Duuren, Jan de Heer, Klaas Heijboer, and Klaas de With. Maarn thus became a new stepping stone in the route to freedom. In Maarn, the paratroopers slept in the garage at the chauffeur's house belonging to estate 'Huis te Maarn' where C. Idenburg and his wife G.J. Idenburg-Duiveman resided. Their two sons named Cor and Henny were members of the local *BS* [*Binnenlandse Strijdkrachten*, an armed resistance group]. Together with Piet de Bruin from Maarn and Wout Verbeek from Doorn they guided 'airbornes' by bicycle for part of their journey southward. From Groot-Ammers the route passed through the Alblasserwaard towards Sliedrecht.

After Noord-Brabant had been liberated during the first week of November 1944, the Hollandsch Diep, Amer, and Bergsche Maas formed the watery border between occupied and liberated territories. Thus, in the surroundings of Dordrecht, several 'cross lines' arose through which Allied

airmen could be transported (see Map 1). The first route ran from Hardinxveld over the Boven-Merwede towards Werkendam and further towards the little harbor at Drimmelen. Via this route various passages were made by a handful of Allied airmen in the autumn of 1944. The second route began in Sliedrecht and ran over the Beneden-Merwede and the Nieuwe Merwede towards Lage Zwaluwe. A third route began on the Tongplaat to the south of the Eiland van Dordrecht and ran via the Nieuwe Merwede to Lage Zwaluwe. However, no airmen were transported along this route. Among the various 'cross lines' that began from the Hoekse Waard, only one line from De Wacht near 's-Gravendeel to Moerdijk was used once to move airmen.¹³⁴ Around Christmas 1944, an attempt was made to move a group of twelve people including two Allied airmen (Captains Dundale and Olse) from Strijensas to Noord-Brabant. On the morning of the crossing, the entire group was intercepted and arrested. One-half of the young Dutchmen were shot and killed. Dundale and Olse were made prisoners of war and taken away, but both men survived the war. There was only one true 'pilot line' among the 'cross lines' and that was the route from Sliedrecht.



Map 1. 'Cross lines' arose through which Allied airmen could be transported.

One of the first people to use this escape route was General Hackett. At the beginning of February 1945, the general who had by then almost fully recovered from his wounds left by bicycle, accompanied by the couriers named Jan Snoek, 'Elsa' Caspers and Heine van Leeuwen. They traveled via Maarn, Utrecht, Schoonhoven and Groot-Ammers to Sliedrecht. The general was taken by Koos Meijer to Lage Zwaluwe located within liberated territory during the night of 5 to 6 February 1945.¹³⁵ It had been arranged that the para-surgeon named Lipmann Kessel who had performed Hackett's surgery in Arnhem, and the Scottish doctor named Graeme Warrack would

accompany the group.¹³⁶ Kessel had the misfortune of seeing his canoe spring a leak, forcing him and his guide to return to shore. However, one week later he reached Brabant safely. Warrack arrived in Lage Zwaluwe shortly before Hackett in a canoe rowed by Jan Visser. Several days after Hackett's safe arrival, Radio Oranje broadcast the message "The goose has flown!" which was the coded message meant to inform the people who had helped the brigadier-general escape that he had indeed arrived safely. After completing his crossing safely, Kessel arranged for two large motorized Canadian canoes to be made available to the guides. After this notable success, more airmen could be taken from their underground hideaways by bicycle to Sliedrecht and from there by canoe to Lage Zwaluwe. Via this route which had been organized by D.H. van Gool, a total of forty-six Allied personnel, including about thirty-five airmen, could be transported to Noord-Brabant during ten crossings in the spring of 1945. This represented merely a few of the total number of 364 crossings made from Sliedrecht to Werkendam.¹³⁷

The crossings were a risky undertaking. One dangerous point along the route was Kop van 't Land. There the Germans had erected observation towers on both sides of the river so that the boats were forced to hold course exactly within the midline of the river. There was always the danger of being intercepted by a patrol boat. The men at the oars had to row with utmost care because any sound that the oars made would be carried far across the surface of the water. Moreover, the enemy might spot the point of departure when groups of airmen, accompanied by their guides, arrived at the site. Arie ('Aaike') van Driel, who was almost 40 years old, had made more crossings, i.e., forty-three in total, than any other river guide. On 10 March 1945, he was captured near Kop van 't Land while making a crossing and was executed by firing squad on 30 April, just days before liberation.

Kragt and Piller were placed in charge of organizing illegal transportation of 'airbornes' from the central area of The Netherlands to Sliedrecht. Kirschen and Moyse – the two other Belgians from their team had departed earlier – had been ordered in January 1945 to escape through the lines themselves. The men were to report to someone on the northern shore of the Waal where they would be picked up by a boat sent by M19. Kirschen would leave Kragt behind to oversee the remaining evacuations. Moyse and Kirschen, however, did not succeed in reaching the northern shore of the Waal in time so that the crossing had to be cancelled. In mid-February, both men moved to Rotterdam where they remained for one month before cycling to Sliedrecht. There they were taken by row boat to Lage Zwaluwe during the night of 14 to 15 March.

From the beginning of April 1945, the Allies had forbidden the 'airbornes' to attempt crossing the lines into liberated territory. This was clearly a word to the wise: liberation was at hand.