

## Mia Lelivelt - The Dutch Resistance Cross

Mia Lelivelt, whose family lived in the town of Lichtenvoorde, in the Achterhoek region of Holland, was born on the 4 April 1925. Her mother's parents lived in Osnabruck in Germany and on a visit to them in 1935 they warned the family to stock up on food, keep it hidden and prepare for the worst - possibly war. Mia's father was a carpenter and in 1938 built a small, secret room in the house attic which only Mia and her father and mother knew about. Access to the attic, which was stocked with food, water, household goods and spare clothing, was only known to them.

During WW2 Lichtenvoorde lay on the route of the Dutch Resistance escape route for fugitives, Jews and Allied aircrew heading south to Belgium and France. Shortly after the German invasion on the 10 May 1940, Mia's father, Martin Lelivelt, together with loyal Dutch patriots, formed a very active Resistance group. Hiding places were needed in local houses and farms to assist fugitives and to hide stores, arms and equipment. When her father asked her to assist him in the Resistance, Mia agreed immediately, although he had requested that she take time to consider it. She had had experience of German activity while staying with her grandparents when they were raided at their home in Osnabruck, so she already saw the dangers but reasoned that it would only likely be for a short time, involving only a few people. She spoke German well and was able to find her way across Germany by rail. Mia and her father agreed to involve her mother as little as possible, as she was very nervous and worried about their future.

Living in a small village, Mia and her father had to pursue their Resistance work with extreme caution. On many occasions evaders were collected from the local church at early mass, at 5am. There were escaped prisoners, Jews, fleeing Resistance workers, students wishing to escape the Nazi forced labour camps and, especially from the end of 1942, downed Allied aircrew. The secret attic now stored people as well as provisions. When they arrived at the house, Mia was responsible for burning the clothing and uniforms in the fire, and the provision of Dutch clothing, because it was necessary for her father to be in his workshop, opposite the house, during normal working hours as the Germans made use of the workshop too and would have noticed his absence.

Normally up to three men were hidden in the false attic at any one time. On other occasions Mia would collect fugitives from the station and take them to local farmers, where they would work on the farm if they were Dutch, before moving on. Allied aircrew became the priority and they had to be kept apart from other fugitives for fear of betrayal, so they stayed in the attic; other fugitives were hidden around the house. The logistics of daily life required rules: only family washing on the washing line; toilet not flushed when the family were out; no lights in 'unoccupied' parts of the house; correct numbers of 'family only' place settings at the table. The main fear in the area was local collaborators.

Before aircrew evaders could continue on their journey south to freedom a complicated set of ID Cards, passes and security visas had to be prepared for them - each country they were to pass through required a different format of stamps and facial profile photos. It was a lengthy process and very nerve racking task for a young girl to arrange. Many allied aircrew, Jews and young Dutchmen had passed through the safe-house en-route to England. Evaders were handed over to others on the line and continued on to Belgium. All the aircrew who passed through the Lelivelt home reached England and made contact with Mia again after the war.

At 3pm on the 20 April 1944 there was a loud banging on the door. A British and an American evader were quickly locked in the hide before Mia's father opened the door. The Germans searched the house in the company of the infamous Dutch traitor Willy Markus, who was working for the Gestapo. They found no-one so started questioning Martin Lelivelt. Mia walked calmly down the stairs and addressed the Germans in German as she took them into the kitchen where she had laid a table for the five members of the family. Although the Germans found nothing, they arrested Mia's father and took him away to Camp Vught, where he was severely tortured but revealed nothing.

Martin Lelivelt managed to get a message to Mia informing her that he was in serious trouble and to look after her mother. He was executed by firing squad on the 25 July 1944 in Fort Rijnauwen, where there is now a stone placed in his memory. Although Mia had always taken extreme caution, it was decided that the safe-house was to be considered blown. Many others in the Resistance group were also betrayed by the same collaborator. Mia continued working with the Resistance, but the hide never again housed evaders, only food.

Mia cancelled her studies to look after her mother, who had become ill, and her two younger brothers. At the end of the war the family kept in close contact with the dozens of aircrew evaders from the USA, Australia, Canada, and the UK who they had hidden, and received invitations to their homes. Many of the men and their families also visited Mia in Holland. As Mia's father had no final resting place she adopted the grave of P/Officer Ronald Jacques, which she visited frequently for his family in England until her death, and also tended many aircrew graves in Lichtenvoorde.

Mia attended Escape Line events of the former RAFES and attended ELMS Reunions in York and London. After the war her father was awarded a posthumous MBE by the British and their street was renamed Martin Lelivelt straat in his honour.

A very quiet, religious and friendly lady, Mia Lelivelt, holder of the Dutch Resistance Cross, died on 15 October 2020 age 95.

*In 2013, the attic in Mia's home was visited by Jean Moaning of the Achterhoeks WW2 Museum, together with its owner, Thomas Schroer. They reached the top floor of the house but were unable to locate the secret hide - no doorways and no hatches! They pressed floor boards, walls and roofing but, although aware of its presence, could not access it. Mia advised pushing an area of floor boards and access was achieved. The visitors agreed that this 'safe-house' had to be preserved for future generations. Obviously, they could not take the house, but decided that the attic and secret room had to be rebuilt at the museum, so a project involving young apprentice carpenters reproduced the attic and hide at the Museum, a memorial both to Martin Lelivelt's skill and to the family's patriotism and bravery.*