

# **MY WORLD WAR II MEMOIRS**

**by Frederick J. Gerritz**



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by Frederick J. Gerritz, Sr.

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**SECTION ONE**

Anaheim, California  
August 1993

To The Reader:

Many years have passed since my entry into the United States Army Air Corps in January of 1943, my Radio Operator and Aerial Gunnery training, my Combat Missions over Germany and German occupied Europe, that fateful day on August 15, 1944 when my B-24 Liberator Bomber was shot out of the sky by German ME 109-G aircraft, my successful evasion from German capture due to the Dutch underground, my return to US Army Control and ultimate honorable discharge from the US Army Air Corps.

In writing these memoirs I have tried to recall each event as factually as memory is able to bring back said events.

I would like to dedicate these memoirs and the effort put forth in writing them to all of the friends who took such an active part in my life during my military career in the United States Army Air Corps and specifically after my assignment to the Eighth Army Air Force.

Bomber Crew  
466th Bomb Group (Heavy)  
787th Bomb Squadron  
8th Air Force  
Attlebridge, England

1st. Lt.	John Suchiu	Pilot
2nd. Lt.	Mervin Ransom	Co-pilot
2nd. Lt.	Melvin Purvis	Navigator
2nd. Lt.	Arthur Palladino	Bombadier
T/Sgt.	Frederick Gerritz	Radio Operator/Gunner
T/Sgt.	Emile Piazza	Engineer/Gunner
S/Sgt.	Robert Abbott	Tail Gunner
S/Sgt.	Lowell Stiles	Waist Gunner
S/Sgt.	Edward Dobran	Waist Gunner
S/Sgt.	Jerome Samburg	Ball Turret Gunner

#### My Netherlander Benefactors

Albert Kok	Original Contact
Margie Kok	Wife of Albert Kok
Aaltje Kok	Original Contact
Jan (Joop) Tuut	First Underground Contact
Tiny Tuut	Wife of Jan Tuut
Mr. Dupont	Underground Member
Jan Koning	Underground Member
Oekele Kok	Wrote "Will Help You" Note
Geert Kok	Father of Aaltje Kok
Geertje Kok	Mother of Aaltje Kok

Berend Mulder	Underground Member
Catarina Trompetter	Owner of First Shelter House
Albert Trompetter	Owner of First Shelter House
Frens Trompetter	Son of Albert Trompetter
Janna Trompetter	Wife of Frens Trompetter
Levert Trompetter	Provided Me a Suit, Shirt and Shoes
The Bennik Family	Provided Shelter House
Fred Stegink	Provided Shelter House
Jan Von Vollenhoven	Provided Tent Shelter and Food in Woods of De Bult
Mrs. Thelinss	Owner of Property Where I Camped for Two Weeks
Van Laanzicht	
Janneke Von Vollenhoven	Wife of Jan Von Vollenhoven
Willem (Pa) Hol	Provided Shelter and Sustenance for Eight Months
Wijntje (Ma) Hol	Provided Shelter and Sustenance for Eight Months
Teunis Hol	Son of Willem and Wijntje
Corry Hol	Wife of Teunis
Fokke Hol	Son of Willem and Wijntje
Reinder Dolstra	Teenager Employed by Willem Hol
The Bennik Family:	
Mr. & Mrs. Bennik	
Antonius	
Femia	
Nico	
Theo	
Lise	
Anne Marie	
Harry	

As within any secretive organization, no member of an underground organization was privy to the existence and identity of all other members. I have made every effort to identify and list all of the Netherlanders who aided in my escape. I have reviewed all correspondence received over the years and have tried my utmost to spell each name correctly. If I have erred in any manner, I sincerely apologize. Likewise, if through lack of knowledge of a benefactor I have neglected to name that person, I apologize.

#### Final Note:

Colonel John Woolnough compiled data from numerous sources and has published the History of the 466th Bombardment Group (Heavy) entitled "The Attlebridge Diaries".

To further illustrate the courage, bravery and sacrifices of my Dutch Benefactors I will relate some facts from Appendix V of this book.

There were 231 missions with 5,693 sorties flown and 12,707 tons of bombs were dropped. There were 98 B-24 Liberators eliminated (lost

in action or otherwise destroyed). The number of flyers killed in action was 333 with 171 captured as prisoners of war and 27 interned by neutral countries.

Of the 540 crew members of the 466th Bomb Group (Heavy) who failed to return from combat missions over Germany or German occupied territory only 180 survived when their aircraft were destroyed. Of these 180 men, only 9 successfully evaded capture and internment as prisoners of war; this is a figure of 5%. To me, this is a most amazing statistic.

Frederick J. Gerritz, Sr.  
Anaheim, California  
15 August 1993





**SECTION TWO**

Frederick J. Gerritz  
 466<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group (Heavy)  
 787<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron

Aerial Combat Missions

<u>Date(1944)</u>	<u>Target</u>	<u>Location</u>
June 6	Highway and Railroad Bridge	Pontaubault, France
June 7	Railroad Junction	Laigle, France
June 8	Railroad Bridge	Pontaubault France
June 11	Airfield	Beauvais, France
June 14	Rocket Launch Site	Domleger, France
June 18	Airfield	Wesermunde, Germany
June 20	Oil Refinery	Oostermoor, Germany
June 21	Fredrickstrasse Railroad Station	Berlin, Germany
June 23	Rocket Launch Site	Belle Croix, France
June 24	Airfield	Toussus, France
June 25	Airfield & Ammo Dump	Bretigny, France
June 28	Railroad Marshalling Yard	Saarbrucken, Germany
July 1	Rocket Launch Site	(Recalled due to weather)
July 5	Airfield	Le Culot, Belgium
July 7	Oil Installation	Lutzkendorf, Germany
July 12	Railroad Marshalling Yard	Munich, Germany
July 16	Railroad Marshalling Yard	Saarbrucken, Germany
July 17	Rocket Launch Site	Wadicourt/ Blangermont, France
August 1	Rocket Launch Site	Wadicourt/Mt. Louis, France
August 4	Aircraft Assembly Plant	Rostock, Germany
August 6	Oil Installations	Hamburg, Germany
August 8	Airfield	Clastres, France
August 12	Airfield	M o u r m e l o n - Surmarne, France
August 13	Highways	Lisieux, France
August 14	Airfield	Dole/Tavaux, France
August 15*	Jet Airfield	Vechta, Germany

\* Mission Incomplete - Missing in Action



**SECTION THREE**

## MY WORLD WAR II MEMOIRS

by Frederick J. Gerritz, Sr.

I entered the service on January 1, 1943 via draft board in the city of Tonawanda, New York at 19 1/2 years of age. I then traveled by bus to Fort Niagara and on to Nashville, Tennessee for classification; then went to Gulfport, Mississippi and Keesler Field at Biloxi, Mississippi. I classified for Radio Operator and Gunner on heavy bomber in the Army Air Corps. In March 1943, I went from Keesler Field, Biloxi, Mississippi to Scott Field, near Belleville, Illinois. At Scott Field I started 16 weeks of radio operator school in April, 1943.

Soon after arriving at Scott Field I had a blind date with Laretta Hollenbeck (thanks to John Butterfield) in May, 1943. We went to Forest Park Highlands amusement park and then onto "SS Admiral" to sail down Mississippi River; danced even though I really did not know how to do so. During 16 weeks of radio school, I had 1 1/2 days off each week. I usually managed to see or date Laretta Hollenbeck (I guess I liked her) and usually saw her every Wednesday evening at USO in Belleville (dancing became more proficient). I went on a bicycle trip with Laretta, Johnny and Marie Clemons and had to help push Laretta up hills on way home.

Radio School: 6 weeks days  
6 weeks evenings  
6 weeks nights

Learned Morse code and electronics, tuning of equipment. Had 1 1/2 hours calisthenics per day, 6 days a week: could run 5 miles with ease. Graduated radio school in September 1943. Moved to Harlingen Air Force Base in Texas for Aerial Gunnery School which turned out to be a fun time. Fired pistols, shot guns, .30 caliber and .50 caliber machine guns. Machine guns both hand held and turret mounted. Also fired from upper turret on Lockheed Hudson Aircraft at sleeve being towed by AT-6 aircraft. Did very well in gunnery school, graduated with "Expert" badge. Main complaint about was a nice little town where residents rode horses up and down main street. If I remember correctly, street was not paved in 1943.

November, 1943, after gunnery school, graduated and went to Salt Lake City but do not know why. Had to sleep in tent in December, mighty cold. All the barracks were overcrowded. I guess they shipped us around to keep the troop trains moving. Then transferred to Kearns, Utah for assignment to crew for flying B-24 Liberator.

January 1944, our crew transferred to Westover Field, near Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, for further training. We flew many practice missions, very cold, uncomfortable (no electric flying suits) and did further gunnery firing on range over Atlantic Ocean. We had Vienna sausages 6 days in a row for dinner, complained because cooks (German POW'S) were eating steaks (situation is normal).

February 1944, crew transferred to Mitchell Field, Long Island, New York to pick up B-24 we were to fly overseas. Had time to go into the city of New York. Went to Billy Roses' Diamond Horseshoe Review. The bartender told us to sit at bar, if you set down it costs \$8.00 cover charge. We all ordered a bottle of beer (Dobran drank mine) at \$.99 a bottle. Saw good "girly" show! for 1944.

February 1944, Flew on B-24 to Dow Field at Bangor Maine for final overseas processing. In final processing a personnel sergeant while looking at my records asked "Haven't you ever qualified with the carbine?". I replied, "No". He replied, while rubber stamping my record, "You are now a marksman with the carbine. Next". That was the easy way of qualifying with a weapon.

From Dow Field, we headed for Prestwick, Scotland. It was a long, monotonous over water flight. We flew some 100 miles south of Greenland and checked in by radio with a station on Greenland called "Bluie West II". I can remember our call sign for voice radio was "Ampoule Mike". One plane with call sign "Baker, Baker" must have had a pilot who did not trust his navigator. About every 15 minutes he asked for a "QDM" (magnetic heading) to reach the next landing point; we were headed at this time for Iceland.

We reached Iceland without anything out of the ordinary occurring. It was a forlorn looking place in February to be sure. Bleak, rocky, windy, rainy, cold, and boring describes it perfectly. We had good shower facilities, but the toilets were "outhouses" (all the comforts of the country at Meta). We had to stay on Iceland 5 days because the wind came up and blew about 100 MPH. We had to put sandbags on the wings and the landing gear to prevent damage to the aircraft. Cables were strung as a routine matter between the buildings so you had something to hold onto when venturing to the mess hall, outhouses, etc. People live on Iceland, but why? We finally took off for Prestwick, Scotland.

As we flew over Scotland, I could not help but marvel at the beauty of the countryside, nothing was out of place to mar the landscape. We were fortunate to be able to go into one of the nearby towns to play tourist. I was further amazed to find every Scotsman was friendly beyond measure. Two or three showed us around their properties, gave us tea and snacks and talked by the hour. A most congenial lot of people.

When we departed the RAF base at Prestwick, we left our aircraft behind for modifications and proceeded to "Nutts Corner", Ireland.

At roll call one morning, Bob Abbott, was still in bed when they called his name. Being his friend I replied, "Here". The Sergeant called again "Abbott", and again I replied "Here". The Sergeant said "What's your service number?" I replied, "3555,35,45", the Sergeant said "OK". But, guess who came walking out about halfway through roll call? You guessed it, my buddy, Bob Abbott. Fortunately, the Sergeant did not ask of him his name. I never did that again!

From Nutts Corner, we went into England and to our base at Attlebridge. Prior to going into combat we had to undergo some practice missions. On one of these, we had practice bombs weighing 90% sand, 10% powder. Our lead plane made a slight mistake; instead of bombing a camouflaged "fake" base, he had us drop our bombs down the runway of a camouflaged RAF base. It was a good thing he didn't bomb the hanger area! On one of these practice missions, I became eligible for the caterpillar club. We were at 4000 feet and in the pattern to land when all engines stopped. I opened the bomb bay doors and we were ordered out by the pilot. I left at about 2700 feet and immediately pulled the handle and felt my chute open. Seven of us bailed out. The instructor pilot had the wrong chute and could not bail out. He, Suchiu and Ransom belly flopped the plane onto our base without injury.

I rolled up my chute and was picked up by an Englishman with a chauffeur driven Rolls Royce and they drove me back to my base. I travel with class! We stayed overnight in the base dispensary for observation with no ill effects.

My maiden combat flight took place on D-Day, June 6, 1944. We took off at approximately 1pm. It usually took about 45 minutes to get into formation what with airplanes from various groups and squadrons flying all over England. Our formation aircraft was a stripped down B-24 which was first painted white and then had lightning bolts painted in red from front to rear, quite easy to see. Our target was a concrete bridge in France. Our group made first pass at 15,000 feet but could not see target, had orders to bomb visually. After 2 more bomb runs, finally hit it from 2,700 feet. I could hear the bombs exploding. Mission accomplished we headed for home and real trouble. As we approached the coast of England there was an overcast at about 2,000 feet. The formation we were in dived down to get under the clouds and in doing so the formation broke apart and planes were going in every direction, what a mess! Upon orders we put our chutes on and the bomb bay doors were opened. After a harrowing 1/2 hour we finally got into our flight pattern and as we were approaching the runway on our landing leg, a plane flew over the top of us, perpendicular to our course, and lit up our flight deck with its landing lights. It scared us not a little bit! We were sure glad to get onto the ground.

From D-Day, June 6, through August 13, 1944 we were on alert to fly



every day. We actually completed 21 combat missions. Among the more notable ones were flights to:

Saarbrucken - This was a railroad marshalling yard. Our flight to target was uneventful but over target, on our bomb run, the flak was furiously heavy. I think we flew down the rectangular pattern of all the anti-aircraft guns. One piece of flak came through the top turret plexiglass, hit Piazza on the flak helmet and went out again. Another piece came up from underneath and ripped its way through the upholstery around the flight deck, sending cotton flying throughout that area - just like a snowstorm. We had our hydraulic system knocked out so we had to land without brakes. As we traveled about half way down the runway, six of us went to the very rear of the plane to bring the rear down onto the tail skid. At the same time, a chute was attached at each side waist window and thrown out to billow forth to help slow us down. We ran off the end of the runway and stopped after rolling about another 100 yards. The unofficial count was 42 holes in the aircraft and no one was injured. The Lord was with us that day.

Berlin - The English had sort of a monopoly when it came to bombing Berlin; they carried out their attacks at night when the populace would have liked to have been in bed sleeping (psychological warfare). I was only on one mission to Berlin. The flak was of only medium density and there was just a token force of Fokke Wolf 190's sent up against us. We were fortunately, in the right place because the fighters hit the formation to the right of us, passed under us and hit the formation to the left. We returned to base without incident.

Kiel - Our attack on the submarine pens at Kiel was a most unusual experience. As we approached our target for our bomb run we found the enemy had put smoke creating barges outside the harbor. The smoke completely obliterated the area. Fortunately, we had radar bomb sights and were able to drop our bombs on target. The flak curtain was here again, of medium intensity. Returned to base without further incident.

German/Swiss Border - The longest flight I participated in was to bomb a purported jet aircraft production facility on the German/Swiss border. It was very tiresome to be on oxygen for some 12 hours. Other than being of long duration the flight was otherwise boring, no fighter attacks and the flak was very light. I guess they had their anti-aircraft weapons protecting more important targets.

Hamburg - This was probably the most awesome mission in which I took part. Except for the fact that people were getting killed it could perhaps be labeled "entertaining". Ours was the last group to bomb the target and our flight of 12 aircraft was in the right place again. As we started our bomb run, the sky ahead of us seemed to be literally painted black with the residue from the

anti-aircraft shells that had previously exploded; it was almost as if you could have exited the aircraft and walked from one black cloud to the next one. As we approached the target, I stood between the pilot and co-pilot seats for added protection. However, this proved unnecessary for as fate would have it, there were no flak shells to explode this day within a mile of us. It was amazing! The flights to the right and left of us were both undergoing anti-aircraft fire and we just flew right down the center void. I just stood there and watched the show. Unfortunately, we did see one of the aircraft to our right receive a direct hit. The complete right wing came off and the rest of the aircraft went into a spin. As it plunged downward, we did see four chutes open. It was a miracle that anyone exited what with the centrifugal force being generated by the spinning fuselage. It must have been about three full minutes that we flew through the previously expended anti-aircraft shells. It was an interesting but frightening experience. We returned to base without incident.

Munich (Munchen) - The three successive flights we made to Munich were perhaps the most devastating ever inflicted upon any German city. On each of these three flights, some 1,000 heavy bombers took part. Each aircraft was carrying three tons of bombs. Each of the four bomb bay sections was stacked with two 500 lb clusters above and one 500 lb general purpose bomb at the bottom. As we approached the target each day there was only light anti-aircraft fire. The Germans had evidently moved their guns to protect the more strategic targets. The bomb bay racks were programmed to release each of the four sections individually. First the 500 lb general purpose bomb was released, its purpose was to blow up and demolish the buildings. Next the two 500 lb clusters were released. As they left the bomb bay, a trigger mechanism was released in the front of each cluster. After about 8-10 seconds an explosion occurred which scattered 500 incendiary bombs over the area to ignite the debris left from the general purpose bomb explosion. The total bombs dropped in three days added up to 3,000 tons of general purpose bombs, 6,000 tons of incendiary bombs. These 6,000 tons accounted for 12,000,000 individual incendiary devices. Munich must have burned for weeks. I had hoped to see the city, or what was left of it, on my way home from Europe but was unable to do so. Munich must have really been a total disaster after this series of three attacks. The flak on these three missions was very light and each flight was completed without further incident.

I might point out at this time that after each flight all the crews were taken to a debriefing room. Each of us would receive, for medicinal purposes, a double shot of whiskey. Being a non-imbiber, I always gave mine to LT Suchiu; he always needed it. We were then taken to the mess hall for a hot meal and then returned to our living quarters.

Vechta, Germany - As you are all well aware by now, this mission led to disaster and terminated my combat flying experiences.

It all began on August 15, 1944. We were awakened at 5am. After washing and dressing we were driven to the mess hall for breakfast. Because we were one of the first crews to arrive, the mess sergeant would usually ask us how many eggs we wanted and how we wanted them cooked. After the crowd started arriving some 20 minutes later, it was a case of taking your eggs scrambled and liking it.

After breakfast it was off to the mission briefing, via truck. This was when we were informed of where and what our target was and when we could expect to arrive over target. In addition, we were told what to expect in the way of anti-aircraft and fighter opposition. Anti-aircraft fire was supposed to be minimal for we were to bomb a jet aircraft airfield at Vechta. There was very little information ever available regarding fighter aircraft opposition; this was because the Luftwaffe at this time only had a small number of combat aircraft available and these aircraft were continually being deployed at various locations. Next, we picked up our flight gear and parachutes and were transported via truck to our aircraft. After pre-flighting the aircraft, we boarded and fifteen minutes later all engines had been started and we were ready to taxi. Ten minutes later we were rolling for takeoff; I always prayed on takeoff what with 2,700 gallons of gas and four tons of bombs aboard I felt we needed help getting into the air.

Our flight to Vechta was without incident and we bombed the airfield without incident. Everyone was in a relaxed mood and we were on our way back when we were suddenly set upon by Messerschmidt 109-G's. They just came out of nowhere. I later learned they had rockets mounted to their fuselages and had flown straight up through the formation to attack us. After their initial pass, the attackers then assumed their traditional pursuit attacks. I was at my vulnerable radio position so I stood up and positioned myself behind and between the pilot and co-pilot and behind Piazza who was then in the upper turret. I figured the attacking fighter aircraft would have to shoot through the upper turret armor, all of the machine gun hardware and some 700 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition boxed in front of the upper gunner in order to get to me. After three passes, I noticed our bomb bay was afire so I disconnected my headset and oxygen mask. I affixed an oxygen bottle to my mask and went for the fire extinguisher. LT Suchiu must have given the order to bail out because the next thing I see is Piazza sliding out of the upper turret and he puts on his chute. I immediately put mine on and in about 5 seconds he had made his way to the nose wheel door, rolled over on his back and was gone. I was about 2 seconds behind him. We had been instructed to free fall to about 3000-5000 feet before opening our chute; this to avoid detection from the ground. I figure I pulled my D-ring at about 3500 feet and the chute blossomed forth. I then

realized our bomber had exploded just seconds after I had bailed out. It seemed to me that it had crashed to earth some 300 yards from where I was due to come down. As I was descending, I looked for other chutes. The first one I noticed was totally engulfed in flames and had collapsed. Evidently, the chute had been deployed too soon and the explosion of our plane had ignited the canopy. The flier was actually without benefit of a chute and was killed upon contact with the ground. As I was making my parachute descent, I noticed that the shoes I had tied to my chute harness had departed my company. I also busied myself loosening the harness leg straps; this so there would be no delay in getting out of the harness upon reaching terra-firma. When I was at an altitude of about twenty five hundred feet, some unexpected company arrived, if only for a brief moment. From the west at my altitude, coming directly toward me was a black fighter aircraft; this meant it was the enemy. The closing time of this aircraft was but a matter of a few seconds, I waved to the pilot as he screamed on by me. Then I realized why he was in such a hurry; just a short distance behind him, hot on his tail, was a P-38 Lightning fighter plane. I grasped my shroud supports and turned myself about to watch the show. Score one for the good guys, about five seconds after the P-38 passed me by he had fired upon the German fighter and had shot it down for a "kill". After confirming the German had crashed the P-38 turned about and returned to the battle. I waved to him but I believe he had too many other things on his mind to pay any further attention to me. As I was nearing the ground, it occurred to me that I had never entertained the thought that the German fighter pilot would fire upon and kill me while I was in my parachute descent. All during his approach and fly by I was completely at ease - ignorance is bliss. Upon reaching the ground, I made a four point landing. In succession, I hit on my feet, hip, shoulder and then head. I managed to get a goodly part of my body into the act. My brain began to function in high gear at this time; collapse chute, roll up chute, hide chute. I collapsed the chute in about 5 seconds, there was little wind. I then took off my harness and rolled everything up as best I could. Looking around, I saw something which shocked me; about one-half mile away, to the south, German fighter aircraft were landing. It was the German Airbase from which the Messerschmidt 109Gs had taken off to attack us. I then spotted an irrigation ditch and headed for it! I quickly climbed down into said ditch put the chute down and covered it somewhat with dirty water and mud; I wanted to get out of the area as soon as was possible. After covering the chute I ran for about five minutes along the various ditches, making some four turns. Before starting my ditch run, it had occurred to me that I did not know what country I was in, Germany or Holland; thus my ditch jaunt. Upon stopping, I heard voices. I peered up over the edge of the ditch and saw two boy teenagers walking toward me. They being some distance off, I crawled out of the ditch, along the ground, under a wire fence and covered myself with some newly cut hay to hide. The boys eventually walked right along the fence line where I lay. To this day I feel they saw me but made no

sign of such sighting.

I remained in this spot until darkness fell. It was a clear night with a bright moon so I had no problem finding my way. After I had walked a few miles I came to some houses which I by-passed. I then came to a road intersection. One of the road directional signs pointed to Assen. I believe it said some 25 kilometers. I pulled out my escape kit box and opened up my map. What a relief it was to find that Assen was in Holland; I would really have been in trouble had I come down in Germany. We had been briefed to head north and to get to neutral Sweden. I brought forth my little compass, oriented myself, and headed north, keeping to the fields and off the roads. I had by this time discarded my heavy flying clothes and was now dressed in the electric flying suit. This consisted of a jacket, pants and slippers. The slippers were heavy enough to provide ample protection to the feet. Being summer time the flying suit provided satisfactory body warmth. I was on my northward trek at about midnight when I noticed a short distance to my right, silhouetted in the moonlight, a large number of what appeared to me to be two man tents. I froze in my tracks and slowly put myself into the prone position. I peered at the tents, with heart pounding, and listened for voices; there were none. I slowly crawled toward the tents and was able to discern that they had the same shape from various angles. They were round and could not be tents. I crawled close enough to discover my supposed tents were made of hay. The farmer had cut the hay and then stood a goodly amount of it upon its end, thus the appearance of tents. I decided to call it a night at this time. I went into the middle of the hay field, made a clearing under one of the standards of hay and crawled into my "tent" for the night. During these some five hours I had not seen or heard anyone. I surmised that there must have been a night time curfew in effect. For this reason I felt secure in my little abode and slept through the night. I awakened at 8am to another warm, clear day. I arose and started, once again, my northward journey. I walked most of day across the fields, stopping only in wooded areas. Upon one occasion, I found myself walking parallel some 100 yards from four or five people working in a hay field. Without hesitation I just continued on, giving them an arm wave. I acted like I belonged there. Some two hours later I came across a horse watering trough filled with water. Being of thirst I pulled out my escape kit, took the plastic pouch provided, filled it with water, and deposited therein a water purification tablet. I then proceeded to shave myself; I must be neat and there was plenty of water with which to shave and wash. One half hour later I had found my way into another wooded area and sat down for brunch. Our escape kits included food tablets that were about one-half inch square. When chewed up, swallowed, and followed by two glasses of water the tablet contents would become swollen. This provided the feeling of a full stomach and contained the actual nutrients of an actual meal. The kit contained about 20 of these full meals. At about noon, on August 16, I started north again. I was of course walking through the

countryside, but it surprised me that no one was about. I was walking casually so I was not making much mileage. At 6pm I decided to call it a day, found myself a wooded area and relaxed till after dark at which time I dozed off.

I awoke at dawn and before starting out on my journey again I decided to "think over" my situation. I was many days journey from the North Sea. Sweden lay directly north of Germany. Holland and Norway were both occupied by Germans. If I was able to travel to the north of Holland, I would still have to travel across the North Sea to get to Sweden. This would have to be accomplished with unfriendly forces all around. The odds were heavily against me. I therefore decided to take a chance and try to contact the Dutch Underground. I would either succeed or become a prisoner of war.

At approximately 11am on August 17, 1944, I was walking along a country road in Vledder when I saw three people working in a field cutting oats; they were some 100 yards distance from me. I crawled under the fence into the field where they were working. Squatting down in the wheat field, so as not to be seen, I walked in their direction. As I approached the open area where they were laboring, I stopped, sat down and peered through the oat crop to observe them. After some short time, maybe one-half hour, two of them departed and entered a nearby farm house. Thereupon, I went to the cut edge of the field and upon catching the lone worker's eye, motioned for him to come to me, he did so somewhat hesitantly. I did not learn his name at this time but when I visited Holland in 1980, I came to know him as Albert Kok. Using my English-Dutch dictionary (a small book included in our escape kits) I explained that I was an American Flyer and needed underground assistance; I also requested food (I was tired of eating escape kit meals). He acknowledged that he understood my needs and departed; I was now in his hands. I nervously awaited his return. Some two hours later he returned with a girl carrying food and a handwritten note (the girl I later learned in 1980, was Aaltje Kok, now Aaltje Eleveld). The note read "friends have wilt you help. When you hear two whistles, whistle two times. Tear up this note and bury it." I destroyed the note and buried it about a foot down in the soft soil and then ate my lunch alone as Al and Aaltje had since departed for the sake of their safety. For purposes of my personal security, I then back tracked into the oat field and then took up a position within the uncut oats some 100 yards from my original position. I wanted to get a look at whoever came into the field later. There was no further action this day. I slept as best I could in the oat field this night.

The next morning on August 18, 1944, I took up a station about 150 yards from my original position where I had contacted Al Kok and waited. It was a clear, warm day. At about 10 AM, a horse and wagon approached down a dirt road and pulled up to the gate leading into the field where I lay waiting. I recognized the farmer as Al Kok, with him was a man dressed in a suit; he was not the farmer

type. Opening the gate, they proceeded on the wagon to my original position and began looking around in the uncut wheat for me; there had not been the two whistle signal. Not finding me they returned to the open area for a short consultation. The man in the suit clothes then whistled twice. I was hesitant about replying in like method and then he once again whistled twice. I then decided to reply; I would either be with friends or a captured airman off to a POW camp. I whistled twice and staying down, showed myself at the edge of the opening. Both men then proceeded to my position and I stood up. Then the unexpected happened. The man in the suit clothes (who I was introduced to as Joop Van Wyjk and later came to know as Joop Tuut (the former name being an alias) embraced me like a long-lost brother; I felt I was in good hands (and arms). We then sat down and talked english in very low tones for we were in Holland. He, Joop, explained he was indeed with the underground and that they would take care of me. He then gave me a pair of one piece coveralls and a pair of shoes, which oddly enough fit very well, to clothe myself differently. Having put on the clothing provided me, Al, Joop and I walked across the open field, through the open gate and across a dirt road. We then entered the barn section of a farm house some two hundred yards from where the three of us had made contact. The house section was attached directly to the barn. We walked across the barn proper, a door was opened and we entered a very clean and nicely furnished kitchen. According to my best recollection, there were three more people there - one man and two women. We shared greetings but not names (I later met the lady of the house, in 1980, as Janna Trompetter). I conversed in english with Joop as we all enjoyed two cups of tea. It was a wonderful feeling to be relaxed and with newfound friends after walking around in a strange countryside for three days.

I was told some years later, while visiting Holland, that I had been ushered into a closet because a German soldier has stopped his automobile outside. It seems he needed water for his radiator. I do not recall this incident. I stayed inside this farm house for about one hour. During this time I was given a complete men's suit, a shirt, tie and shoes. Presently, underground members arrived with three bicycles. We were about to move to another location. Joop Tuut and another man were to ride at the front and I was to follow at about 200 feet to the rear to our destination. In the event I was stopped by anyone they would continue on and I would have to fare for myself. The bicycle trip to the next hide-away was uneventful except that we had to pass within twenty feet of a squad of German soldiers that was marching on the other side of the road way. I noticed that all of the other Dutch citizens were staring at the Germans so I did likewise as I peddled by them. It was an interesting trip and I really did not become overly concerned at the sight of the German soldiers.

About five minutes after the encounter with the German squad we arrived at our destination. I was immediately led inside a two story, single family residence. I saw one person inside and was

instructed to go to the second floor. Joop Tuut led the way and I entered a large bedroom. There was a door on the other side of the bedroom which exited onto a rear, uncovered porch: this door was unlocked. I was told that I could remain inside the room until darkness fell at which time I was to go out onto the porch to sleep. In the event that anyone discovered me there I was to say that I had climbed up the rain spout to seek a safe place to sleep. Due to my age and physical stature at this time, such a feat was entirely possible.

Joop departed and I was again alone. My next action was to peer out from behind the drapes on the door that exited to the porch to get the "lay of the land". It was just an ordinary flat porch, barren of any furnishings with a solid wall and rail about four feet high, nothing unusual. The very next thing I accomplished was an act of pure pleasure. I took off my shoes, took off my socks, rolled up my trouser legs, filled the wash basin with water and washed my feet (one at a time) in the basin. After walking around in heavy felt, electric flying boots through field and woods for two days it was really a super treat to wash one's feet. I then washed my socks, hung them up to dry and sat down to relax in a real padded chair. What a luxurious experience! After dark, I made my way onto the porch. I used my suit coat as a pillow and lay down to sleep, the door to the bedroom was locked behind me.

The next morning, after breakfast, we went for another bicycle ride using the same modus operandi. This was a shorter trip and took us to the rear entrance of a residence above a small retail store located right on the village square in Steenwijk. I saw no other people at this place and remained there but a few hours with Joop Tuut and one other man. We departed this place in mid-afternoon, again travelling by bicycle. This was about a ten minute ride, we left the town of Steenwijk and rode into the countryside. We biked down a dirt, tree covered road into a heavily wooded area which I later in life learned was called "De Bult", which translates to "the hunch" or "the hump". This area was evidently so called because it was a very large wooded area which contrasted greatly with the surrounding flat grazing land. After some three minutes of pedalling into the woodland we came to a halt. Leaving the bicycles just inside the woods from the road we walked into a very dense area some two hundred feet from the road. Here there was an open area some eight by ten feet in which had been pitched a six by eight wall tent. This was to be my home for the next two weeks, I would be camping in the woods. At this time, I was introduced to my host for the next two weeks, Mr. Jan Von Vollenhoven. Jan had been an anti-aircraft artillery officer in the Army of the Netherlands and spoke the English language fluently. This fact helped to make my association with Jan especially close and cordial. Sometime within the next few days another American, Bill Rye, became my tent partner. He had been a tail gunner on one of the other aircraft in my group that had been shot down. For the next two weeks we remained as quiet as possible and I spent most of



my time reading books provided by Jan Von Vollenhoven. Jan would bring us what is now called "a continental breakfast" at about nine A.M. Then at approximately six in the evening he would provide us with a hot meal served from a large thermos type bottle, along with a beverage. We ate very well considering the secretive circumstances. There was no discomfort associated with our camp out experience. We had a nice tent to sleep in, chairs to set upon and it was mid-August which afforded us warm, comfortable weather. As previously mentioned Bill Rye and I did little conversing while in this wooded environment because anyone hearing the English language in a woodland in Holland would become immediately suspect. Likewise, we conversed very little and always in low tones the two times daily that Jan came to the tent site. Even though this was northern Holland, I cannot recall during this two week period any time that rain fell upon us. Early one evening, just about dusk, Jan informed us we were to be re-located. Bill and I packed up our few belongings and along with Jan started our trek to the location that was to be my home for the next eight months. This walk through a farmland area of Holland brought us to the home of Willem and Wijntje Hol. This couple would prove to be, under what I consider the most dangerous situations the most casual and bravest individuals I will meet in my lifetime. I soon, after arrival at this my last hide-a-way came to address Willem and Wijntje as Pa Hol and Ma Hol. Ma and Pa Hol had one son living with them at this time by the name of Fokke. No one in the Hol family spoke english so very shortly after my arrival at their home I took it upon myself to learn the Dutch language as quickly as was possible. Jan Von Vollenhoven visited us 2 to 3 times a week. By using him as an interpreter and Dutch language tutor, I was able to, in the course of about three months, converse with my benefactors. Pa and Ma Hol had two other children, Tuen who was married to Corry and Klasse who was married to Kobus. I never did learn what Kobus' surname was so I will refer to them by Christian name only.

The underground had prepared for our arrival at the Hol's. To the rear of their residence was a building that had been previously used as an artist's studio. It was one large room about 14' x 20'. The roof was at about a 60° angle and one large portion of same was two large glass panels each being about 4' x 8' in size. Thus, we (Bill Rye and I) had no need to use any electric lights at any time. The glass roof sections along with three other windows gave us more than adequate lighting during the daylight hours. The floor of our "home" was of bare wood - not much upkeep required. In fact, the overall amount of housekeeping was negligible. Our hosts, the underground, had cut an irregularly shaped trap door in the floor. Removing the door revealed a hole 8' square and four feet deep with a flat bottom. Around the four walls straw had been bound in stalks about 4" in diameter and mounted so as to completely cover the dirt walls. The floor of our bedroom was covered with about 9" of straw upon which was placed two make shift mattresses. These mattresses were about 3' x 7' and were quite comfortable. They were in fact luxurious compared to the three

concrete hard "biscuits" that we used for a mattress at our quarters back in England. Our living quarters were furnished with a kitchen type table, two chairs and a wood or coal burning stove. The curtains on the three windows were medium weight material so no one could see into the room. This then was our home away from home for what turned out to be an eight month period. This property, the home, the artist studio and an unknown amount of acreage was owned by a Mijneer Grevier. This was his country home but due to lack of gasoline and the fact that he lived in Amsterdam caused him to give up using it during the war.

The most incredible aspect of our stay at this location was the double agent type lives of Pa and Ma Hol. Pa Hol was a fervent member of the underground and was also a game warden working for the German occupying forces. He was allowed to have a double barrel shotgun and an unlimited supply of shotgun shells for bird and rabbit hunting. This position as game warden meant that we had an abundance of rabbit, pheasant and smaller game birds for our meat supply. In his capacity of game warden, Pa Hol would upon occasion entertain, that is accompany on hunting trips, many junior and intermediate ranking German Army and SS officers. On some occasions these German officers would call at the house to pick him up for their hunting trip. When this was the case there was a three type alarm system that alerted us to their pending arrival. Living on each of the dirt roads that led into the area of our abode were two or three families that were associated with the underground movement. Whenever a German occupied vehicle passed by someone would mount a bicycle and take a short cut to alert us of their pending arrival. Bill and I would then do our "into the hole" disappearing act and fasten down the trap door! The door was so cut as to ensure that after we turned the locking devices it was firmly in place and as solid as the rest of the floor. It was a well planned and structured access door. The building was constructed with footings that raised the floor about twelve inches above ground level. This space had intermittent openings that allowed us to get glimpses of anyone moving about the area outside the studio. It was almost pitch black under the building and we were totally unconcerned about anyone on the outside seeing us. It should be noted that once I went into my "bedroom" and closed the door, I was almost totally relaxed and at no time did any of Pa and Ma Hol's guests, German or Dutch ever approach our hide-a-way building.

Our second alarm system resulted from the sand covered incline of the road that led to the Hol home. The German game hunters would always come by automobile and when they drove up the incline they had to shift to a lower gear. This shifting down created greater engine noise and in the quiet of the countryside we could easily hear them approaching. Our third alarm system was in the form of Max, one of two large hunting dogs that were kept in separate pens some thirty feet from our studio. Anyone approaching could be seen at some two hundred feet distance. At this time you could be

assured that Max would make any intruder's presence known. Max was ever alert. He must have possessed highly acute senses when it came to hearing and smelling because he was somewhat limited when it came to sighting things: he was blind in one eye. We did not have to worry about any unannounced guests because of this three way alarm system!

It was only natural that Tuen, Corry and their son Willem (nicknamed "Vim") or Kobus, Klasse and their son Visse would come to visit their parents. When they or Fokke approached, the Max alarm was much shorter and followed by intermittent barks of considerably less volume. This became known as Max's family member approach alarm. I was always totally at ease when I was inside the studio. There were probably some two dozen or so times over my eight month stay here that Bill and I went to the main house for the evening. We would have dinner with the Hol family, Pa, Ma and Fokke. By this time I was well advanced in understanding and speaking my host's language. I had to act as interpreter for Bill for he made no effort to learn any of the language. I did not feel too ill at ease on these visits to the main house but I always felt relieved when under cover of darkness I arrived back home after some fifty feet of travel.

As I have previously mentioned I felt very relaxed and safe once I went down into my bedroom and secured the entrance door. Even though there was no heat for our room beneath the floor, there was never a time that I was cold while in bed. The underground people had provided us with plenty of blankets.

I would like to mention at this time the company I had almost every night after I had gone to bed. I never saw this company but heard them almost every night. The building above us was composed of wood and so I always heard a lot of gnawing noises - rats just love to gnaw away at wood. There was only one aspect of this ubiquitous vermin that initially caused me concern. I could hear them running across the ground under the floor of our home, which here again caused me no concern. However, frequently I could hear a rat running then there would be a break in the running sound and then a light "thump!" I finally determined that what they were doing is jumping across the square corners of my bedroom hole: talk about cause for anxiety! I could immediately picture one or more of them falling into my bedroom with no way out: I realized such a happening would definitely not result in a fun time. For some nights after I surmised what they were doing, I did not sleep too well. In the end, all of my worry was for naught for none of my night jumpers ever came down to join me in bed. For this fact, I was whole heartedly grateful.

Soon after we took up residence in our studio apartment, I took it upon myself to make myself useful to Pa and Ma Hol. I volunteered and thus became Ma Hol's potato and vegetable peeler. I would usually take the foods to my studio and prepare them for her to

cook. On other occasions I would take the food to the front of the main house. This side faced an open area about two hundred feet long and some one hundred twenty feet wide surrounded on three sides by deeply wooded areas with the Hol residence occupying one end of the rectangle. This side of the house had a series of about seven wide steps leading to an open porch and the main entrance. I would sit on the porch or stairs and perform my chores. On infrequent occasions I would perform what tasks I could for Pa Hol. One of these was the chopping of fire wood for the main heating stove in the living/dining room; keep in mind that there was no natural gas here in the country and fuel oil, coal or coke was impossible to obtain. The wood stove in the studio apartment was much smaller but it was very adequate for the small one room home we occupied. There was no heat in our bedroom but even throughout the whole winter on 1944-1945 I never became cold after tucking myself into bed.

Speaking of bedding down, there was one period of time when Bill and I slept in twin beds in the upstairs bedroom of Pa and Ma's house. They momentarily convinced me that it was safe to stay there at night. Bill and I slept therein for two nights. The only thing I accomplished was pressing my one pair of pants. I would dampen the creases, fold the pants and lay them between the box springs and mattress while I slept. This worked fairly well but in reality it wasn't really necessary, no one was concerned about the press in my pants - that is for sure. I did not, however, get very much sleep in these comfortable accommodations. I would become highly ill at ease with every noise I heard outside and lie awake wondering over and over, how to escape from the room if an emergency should arise in the form of German soldiers. I therefore advised Pa and Ma Hol that we would feel much safer down in our bedroom hole in the ground. After all, Bill and I faced a POW camp life, Pa and Ma Hol and their kin would be put to death. In addition the housing structures would be put to the torch to set an example to any other people that gave any thought to sheltering allied military personnel.

My aircraft was shot down on August 15, 1944 and D-Day was on June 6, 1944. The German military command had to bring every able man or older teenager into the battle lines. That meant there were no soldiers available to search for evading allied airmen. The only Germans we were concerned about were those officers that called upon Pa Hol to go hunting. So it was that Bill and I again occupied our studio apartment on 100% of the time basis, much to my relief.

It was now November of 1944. The allied front lines ran through all of France, Belgium and east to west across southern Holland. Any thought of the underground getting me back to allied military control was not considered; how do we get through a continuous battle line? An escape by sea was also impossible because of German naval patrols.

One of the most comforting sights we experienced on many occasions were the hundreds of US army aircraft that would fly overhead on the way to bomb targets in Germany. By this time the countries that Germany had occupied on the western front had in the main been liberated, one exception being the upper two-thirds of Holland. All of the air strikes both US' and Britain's were now being made on Hitler's Duetchland.

A typical major air strike for the Eighth Air Force would consist of from 500 to 1000 B-24 Liberators and B-17 Flying Fortresses. In addition, with the advent of "drop fuel tanks" for the fighter planes, we were under cover of from 200 to 500 P-47 Thunderbolts, P-38 Lightnings and P-51 Mustangs. When the bombers came under attack from enemy aircraft it was the duty of the flight engineer or radio operator to fire a very pistol which was mounted above the radio operator's position. If I recall correctly, we were to fire double red flares as fast as we could reload the pistol. These flares, going forth from some 40-50 aircraft were the signals to our fighter pilots that German fighter aircraft had engaged the bombers in combat and that they, our fighter pilots, were to come to the rescue. The heavy bombers fly straight and level, the pilots can take no evasive action because they must maintain the formation. The bomber's defense consisted of .50 caliber machine guns, 2 in a nose turret, 2 in a top turret, 2 in a tail turret, 2 in a ball turret, which protruded from the bottom of the aircraft while airborne, and one hand held .50 caliber out of each side of the fuselage at the rear. The latter two were referred to as the "waist guns". These flyovers by the Eighth Air Force would occur about 3 to 4 times weekly and would last about an hour. During the winter months when the upper air temperatures were exceedingly cold (40 degrees below zero Fahrenheit) the bombers would lay contrails caused by hot engine exhaust and cold moist air. After some 500-1000 aircraft passed over these contrails would create a complete overcast. In many instances the bombers would return by the same route but could not be viewed because of this self caused overcast. I never tired of viewing the Eighth Air Force Bombers and the Ninth Air Force Aircraft as they flew to and fro over our location. I should point out that the British Air Command aircraft carried out their air strikes under cover of darkness. Their aircraft were painted black and flew without any navigational lights showing. One could hear them passing overhead but were unseen except for the few instances where the moon's light would reflect off the plane's painted surfaces. This lack of illuminated navigational lights necessitated that the pilots fly other than in a formation. The planes would fly some 1-2 miles apart to avoid mid-air collisions. They would be spread out for many miles whereas our bombers flew in close formations and did pattern bombing. Our formation flying resulted in hundreds of .50 caliber guns being brought to bear on any attacking aircraft.

Many interesting events and in some instances tense situations arose during my 8 months of residence in the artist studio. There

were, as previously mentioned, those some ten times when the German officers came to the main house to accompany Pa Hol on hunting trips. We, Bill and I, were forewarned and had retired to our bedroom well in advance of their arrival. I will now, as best as I can recall, delineate some of my experiences. One day Pa Hol notified us that the Germans would be delivering some coke for use in the heating stoves. Once again, prior to their arrival we went to our bedroom. Pa Hol had neglected to advise us as to where the German soldiers were going to deposit the coke. The truck arrived with the coke stored into approximately one hundred pound containers. What happened next was somewhat of a shock - the door to the studio opened and the Germans began carrying the sacks into the studio, emptying the coke onto the floor above. They proceeded to carry in and dump about ten bags of coke into my house; I was more mystified than I was concerned by this activity. Fortunately, this one half ton of coke delivery was the first and only event of this kind. It was nice of the German troops to supply allied airmen with fuel to heat their house during the coming winter. I did not bother to send them a "Thank You" card.

I wrote previously of how allied aircraft flew to and fro above our hide-a-way. On one occasion we heard fighter aircraft flying at low altitude. We made our way outside and were joined by Ma and Pa Hol. We spotted three British "Spitfires" flying in a circular pattern at about one thousand feet. Suddenly, at intervals of about three hundred feet they dove and fired their machine guns at a ground target; they each made two firing passes. Because of their speed of flight and the fact they were about one mile distance from our viewing point the sound of their guns reached us as they pulled up and were leaving the target area. This phenomenon caused Pa Hol to ask me "do those planes have guns in their tails?"; a short explanation of the relatively slow speed of sound waves was in order. Pa Hol, being thus satisfied, we observed the Spitfires as they departed, heading west and for home.

There was one other time when we witnessed air to ground, or I should say, ground to air action. About three miles from our quarters was a small German ammunition depot which was sparsely manned. As we were setting outside our home enjoying the warm weather, two British Mosquitos appeared in the distance heading our way. Mosquitos had two engines and were unusual in that they served as very light bombers and also as fighter aircraft very good for ground troop support. Their most astonishing characteristic was that their outer surfaces were covered with plywood, as such they were wooden military aircraft. The lead Mosquito had one engine out of commission with the propeller feathered. When a prop is feathered it is stopped so that the edge of the blades are facing into the wind. If the prop were not feathered, the wind would cause the prop to turn irregularly. This irregular windmilling causes a violent vibration which would in a short time tear the engine from its mountings. The aircraft would then probably crash. The two Mosquitos were flying at an altitude of

only two to three hundred feet. They were evidently unaware of the ammunition depot because their course was taking them right over it. Just as the planes passed by our viewing point, the Germans began firing at them with what sounded like 20 to 40 millimeter cannons. The Mosquitos immediately turned to the left and cleared the ground fire without any apparent additional damage and continued on towards home.

As previously stated the open area at the front of the main house was rectangular. Some one half mile beyond the bordering woods at the far end of the clearing the terrain arose slowly to a height of about two hundred feet. This higher terrain ran into the distance, to the right, until obscured from sight by the tree line. The entire terrain could be appropriately described as a shallow valley. About a half mile to the right of our position and at the very base of the ascending land was a watch tower, undoubtedly for fire sighting. It was now winter and the tower was unmanned. I was at the front of the main house one day chopping firewood, when I heard the distinguishable sound of the Allison in-line engine that powered the Army Air Corps P-51 Mustang fighter aircraft. I spotted three of them approaching. They were being flown at an altitude of some one hundred and fifty feet and at a relatively slow speed. To my surprise they all fired upon the watch tower with their eight, wing mounted, fifty caliber machine guns. These guns are boresighted so that they converge at eight hundred yards. Each gun in sustained fire shoots 800 rounds a minute. As you can surmise, the three P-51's on just one pass did a vast amount of damage to the tower. The pilots then flew their Mustangs merrily back to their base in England. I could only guess that they were bored and decided to partake of some target practice.

Many of my days while abiding in my artist's studio home were quite uneventful. I read many books, provided by Jan Von Vollenhoven, and on those days that were extra peaceful I would retire to my bedroom for an afternoon nap. After I had become somewhat proficient with the host's language I would polish my skills further by conversing with a teenager Pa Hol employed to do general chores around the property. I will refer to this young lad of about 14 years of age as Reinder Dolstra, because that was his name. Reinder had a round cherub face and a healthy head of naturally curly blond hair. I guess he did not know about our good-guy, bad-guy cowboy outfits because he usually wore black or other shades of dark clothing. He was, however, always a good-guy!

Reinder was ubiquitous, particularly during the warm weather periods. As I recall, he worked forcefully and steadily - an excellent "Handyteenager". During our conversations he naturally had many questions to ask me regarding my flight experiences, life back in the USA and about the USA itself. He also made many declarative statements. He had the uncanny habit of always questioning me as to whether I had understood each of his statements. After each utterance he would look me in the eye and

say "Kijken Fred"? It was then mandatory that I reply in the affirmative. If not, he would ask again "Kijken Fred?". After a few months of "Kijken Fred" I finally had to tell Reinder that it was not necessary for him to "Kijken" me, if I did not understand him I would so advise him and he could then explain further. I know that Reinder outgrew this phase because when Lauretta and I visited with Reinder and his family on our trip through Steenwijk, Holland in 1979, I did not hear a single "Kijken Fred?".

I recall a one time chore that Reinder undertook that was less than pleasant. Pa Hol brought home what I took to be the lining of a cow's stomach. It was Reinder's unpleasant task to scrub all of the foreign matter off the flesh with water and a brush - this was not an easy task. After about fifteen minutes of scrubbing and rinsing his mission was accomplished. I now wondered "what is he going to do with that mess?". This object was about 30" square as I recall. Reinder grasped the flesh by one end, walked to Max the dog's pen, unlocked the gate and threw it onto a board inside the pen to what can best be described as an ecstatic Max. After all of the long, repugnant work Reinder put forth to clean that messy thing, one would think Max would have enjoyed a slow tasty meal. No way Jose. Max snatched one end of his cow's innards meal. Holding on and whipping the other end into the air, he devoured his meal in four gulps - no chewing required. "What a Chow Hound!"

We of the Hol household had been able to keep fully apprised as to the progress of the war on the western front. This was made possible because of our hidden radio which was brought out from its hiding place at least once and perhaps twice daily. I was somewhat elated with myself for having learned the local language and did not need to have the news interpreted to me in english.

We followed the steady progress of the Canadian forces as they battled north after having crossed the Rhine River at Nimegen and Arnhem. On April 11, 1945 the Canadian Army offensive action liberated the city of Steenwijk and continued its northward advance. This news brought tumultuous joy to everyone in our area. The radio was placed in a place of prominence and played at a much higher than customary decibel level. After five to six years of repression the people of the area were once again enjoying freedom.

We immediately made plans to accompany Pa and Ma Hol into Steenwijk the next day. In the interim I joined Pa Hol on a lengthy walk about the surrounding area. It was a stupendous relief to just be able to partake of such a hike through the countryside. I was now able to reciprocate and call upon Jan Von Vollenhoven. I must state at this point that it is impossible to describe the elation of the people of the Netherlands at this time. The visceral feelings after having lived for so many years under the yoke and heels of the occupying German Army are indeed indescribable.

The next day, April 12, 1945, we arose early and while enjoying my



first breakfast in a relaxed atmosphere in 8½ months we tuned in the radio for the latest progress of the war report. A somber voice was currently speaking and commenting on the death of an evidently well known public figure. About one minute later the deceased persons identity was made known with the words "the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt ...". What a bombshell effect that phrase had upon us. Tears immediately welled within my eyes. Franklin D. Roosevelt, a man who had given so much of himself for his country, a President of the United States now in the first year of his fourth term, now deceased and unable to taste the fruits of a victory that would be but only 25 days later: what a calamity! After about an hour of discussing this incredulous happening and returning to a somewhat state of normalcy we decided to walk into Steenwijk for the freedom festivities.

Included in our trip to town were Pa and Ma Hol, Bill Rye and myself. The road that we took necessitated that we cross a small bridge just at the edge of the city. As we approached the bridge we notice two armed men guarding said bridge. The men were members of the underground and were stationed there to prevent any people that had collaborated with the Germans from escaping from the city. It cannot be overstated when it is said that the people of the Netherlands were to treat these collaborators with great disdain. It was then I realized that so few people were aware of the dual role that Willem Hol had been playing for some years. The two armed bridge guards began treating him with a certain degree of animosity and were entertaining thoughts about not letting us into the city. At this point a third underground member came upon the scene and in a vociferous and friendly manner and with a handshake and embrace greeted Pa Hol by name. All was now well at this bridge entrance to the city. Pa Hol now introduced us to his friend as Fred and Bill, the "Americana Pilooten". We were accepted likewise with a fervent handshake and the accompanying embrace. Thereupon, we were with a wave invited to cross the bridge and enter Steenwijk. I now began a most enjoyable day of activity.

It had been some years since the Dutch people had been able to procure leather shoes in any quantity and so it was that a majority of them were wearing wooden shoes this day in Steenwijk. Let it be known also that many of the street surfaces were cobblestone. Imagine now, and I am positive that you can, hundreds of people wearing wooden shoes (called Klompen) walking upon cobblestone streets. It created quite a din. I now came to realize that news travelled very rapidly in this town; the grapevine was in excellent operating condition. In about one-half hours time I believe that nine-five percent of the citizenry was aware that there were two "Americana Pilooten" in town and in one hours time knew us upon sight. From this point on there was a great deal of head turning to look at and a lot of finger pointing at the two Americans that were roaming about the city in the company of Willem Hol. This situation naturally brought into the open the fact that Hol, who

accompanied German military officers on hunting trips and was looked upon with disgust by many was all of this time a member of the underground and was the harbinger of downed allied airmen. Talk about astonished townfolk; there were many of them this twelfth day of April 1945.

I had many interesting experiences that day and two of them stand permanently affixed within my memory bank. This first happening was the rapid manner in which the Dutch underground rounded up and corralled the citizenry that had collaborated with the German occupying forces. It was not a common sight but on infrequent occasions, I would sight two or three underground members escorting up to as many as six people, with heads shaven, along one of the thoroughfares. The general public did not pay too much attention to these happenings. One thing that did cause me consternation; however, was the fact that many of the underground members were armed with the inexpensive Bren machine guns. This in itself was not alarming but some of the escorts so armed did not have the safeties in the "on" position. After sighting two to three such individuals I suggested to Pa Hol that he advise them to safety their guns, which he so did. Whether they then complied I cannot say but I at least had attempted to correct a very hazardous condition. I am happy to report; however, that I did not hear any gunfire reports that day.

After about one hour of the town tour I was escorted into a corner shop that specialized in chocolates, candy and beverages. My escort was a young lady Trudi who resided in a farmhouse just a short distance down the road from my Holland home. Until the Canadians had liberated Steenwijk, she had not been aware of my existence at Pa Hol's house, like everyone else in town she soon became aware of my presence. Trudi was employed by the chocolate shop and when she spotted me and Bill, she grasped our hand and with much exuberance pulled us into the store. We were led to a booth, we seated ourselves and were soon surrounded by ten to twelve happy, excited and giggling eighteen to twenty year old Dutch maidens. I was now an American War Hero in Holland. Thankfully, I had exerted myself and learned the language so for about an hour and a half I enjoyed conversing with all of the Dutch Damsels as well as many other people that passed by the table. There was much laughing, joking and giggling. Bill Rye unfortunately could only sit there and eat. When it came to the conversation part of the occasion he could only set there like the proverbial "bump on a log." At the end of our chocolate shop sojourn, I gratefully expressed our gratitude to our gracious hostesses and we departed to resume our role of tourists.

Once again we rejoined Pa Hol. Throughout the next two hours or so I was introduced to and conversed at length with many of Steenwijk's inhabitants. One man I met was the proprietor of a shop that specialized in "Klompes." It was here that I was measured for and had fitted to my feet my first and probably only

pair of wooden shoes. These were the "real McCoy," no finish or pretty pictures were applied. The eye appealing shoes were for the not in the know tourists, I was now an eight and one-half month resident and also of Dutch descent. No decorative "Klompfen" for me. During the next three days, I made additional trips into Steenwijk and also Steenwijkerwold to visit with both new friends and to contact those I could that had helped me in any way to evade capture by the Germans and saving me from the horrible experience of life in a Prisoner of War Camp. I will be eternally grateful to all of my Dutch benefactors for aiding me in the avoidance of life as a POW.

On my fifth day of freedom provided by the Canadian Armed Forces I had a thought that bordered on a stroke of genius! I told Bill that we should venture to the sight of the Canadian Forces encampment and prevail upon them to provide us with food provisions with which we could partially repay Pa and Ma Hol for eight months of room, board and security. Taking Harry Bennik as a third freeloader we procured three bicycles and headed for the Canadian's food source. Upon arrival at the Canadian camp, I inquired as to the location of the Officer-in-Charge of their Quartermaster Corps. Upon arrival at the Quartermaster site I found the tent of the Officer-in-Charge, requested permission to enter, received same and did so. I greeted the captain that stood before me, introduced myself and those with me and exchanged handshakes. I told the captain about our being shot down, linking up with and living as guests of the underground for eight and a half months. I then made known to him the purpose of our visit, would he please provide us with some foodstuff that we could present to our Dutch friends who had provided for us during our evasion period. The Captain proved to be most gracious and responsive to my request. He preceded us and we walked over to a tent that housed the Top Sergeant. He explained to the Sergeant who we were and advised him as to our needs; he then departed. What happened next was way beyond my wildest expectations. The Sergeant led us outside and over to a line of large wall tents that were some fifteen in number. He entered the first tent and emerging with three huge gunny sacks, he presented one sack to me, Bill and Harry. We then began a visit to the interior of each of the fifteen tents. As we departed each tent our sack became ever more heavily laden with such assorted items as sugar, coffee, tea, baked goods, canned goods such as peaches, pears, pineapple, peas, carrots, beets, beans and many other varieties of food. We received flour, peanut butter, breads, various flavors and types of jams and preserves as well as other items the likes of which I cannot recall. The last tent topped off our shopping list.

The First Sergeant added to our burdensome load large containers of canned meats. We deposited our heavily laden sacks and returned to retrieve our bicycles. Fortunately for us, each bicycle had a flat cargo carrier over the rear wheel. We tied the top of each sack which provided us with an adequate part of the sack which we could

grasp. After we had balanced and tied into place each sack as best we could we prepared for a difficult trip to the Hol house. I requested that the Sergeant express our thanks and appreciation to the Captain. I then profusely expressed our gratitude to the First Sergeant and after giving him a heartfelt handshake we began a very wobbly departure. I would estimate that Bill and I were each conveying about sixty pounds of provisions with Harry travelling at the rear with some twenty-five pounds of food. If I recall correctly, Harry Bennik was ten or eleven years of age at the time of his food transporting experience so we decided to laden him with a much lesser load. The trip back to our homestead took about twenty minutes. I considered it a remarkable feat to balance all of that bulky, uneven weight for all of that time. Although we made several stops to rest, we had done such an excellent job of securing the loads to the cargo carriers that no further adjustment to the fastening ropes was necessary. When the food procurement detail arrived at the Hol residence there was no one to be found at home; this worked out just fine. We thereupon hauled the three sacks of goodies into the dining room and proceeded to place all of the groceries upon the large, round dining room table. After all the sacks had been emptied, we stood back to admire the fruits (no pun intended) of our labors. The entire table which was about six feet in diameter, was completely covered with food and to a height of about twelve inches; what a haul! As I stood there admiring the results of our effort, I had to marvel at the fact that we had hauled all those bulky items on the rear of the bicycles. Bill and I then took one of the sacks and deposited a variety of items therein for Harry to take home. Even after providing him with a wide variety of items, there still remained a great abundance of food. Bidding Harry a fond farewell and "well done", Bill and I sat back, relaxed and awaited the return of our Dutch parents.

Darkness fell upon us before the return of Pa and Ma Hol. We had purposely refrained from turning on any of the house lights so as to lead them to believe that we were not home. They entered at the rear of the house as they customarily did, switched on the kitchen light and then proceeded down the hallway to the dining and living room door which I had kept closed. Pa Hol opened the door and as they stepped into the room, I switched on the lights. I then stated "Pa and Ma Hol we have a gift for you." To say that they were flabbergasted would be putting it very mildly. Looks of astonishment came upon their faces and then came to gasps of disbelief. I believe that every exclamatory word in the language of the Netherlands was then uttered and for good cause. Most of the food items on the table had not been available in Holland for many years and now here they had an abundant supply for their culinary satisfaction. It was truly an occasion for hugging, laughter and tears.

During the next few days, I made other trips into Steenwijk and being able to converse with the Dutch people made for most enjoyable visits. I was able to call upon many of the people who

had helped me travel through the underground pipeline but unfortunately I was unable to make contact with all of them.

About five days after freedom arrived by way of the Canadian Army, I was invited to a Freedom celebration dinner at Laanzicht, a country home and property owned by Mrs. Thelinss Von Laanzicht. It was a very joyous and gala affair and the food was excellent and of very adequate quantities. Considering the many years of occupation and exploitation by the Germans it was a fabulous meal. It was at this event that I learned that the tent I had spent two weeks in before moving in with Pa and Ma Hol was located on the property. The tent site was only about 250 feet from the house in the heavily wooded section of the property. During my camping out period Jan never mentioned the house and I never asked him where he was staying or where his living quarters were located. After dinner I was able to say goodbye to many of the Nederlanders that had aided me in avoiding capture by the Germans.

The next day I advised Pa and Ma Hol that I was going to visit the Canadian encampment to find out how I could get back into the US Army's control again. I headed into Steenwijk to seek out some Canadians. On the outskirts of the city I came across a contingent of light-armored troops. Sitting atop one of the vehicles was an officer with shoulder boards indicating a higher rank. I introduced myself to this officer and the two others with him and showed him my dog tags. I related to him the basic facts relating to how I happened to be in the Netherlands and requested his assistance in getting back to US Army control. I told him I was from the Buffalo area and he said he was from Toronto. I told him how I had been to Toronto but one time when I was seventeen. I had gone there with the Croatian Club softball team to play a game against a Croatian Club team in Toronto. He had been to Buffalo many times and proceeded to ask me questions about the city, its hotels, streets, etc. After I had answered correctly and with no hesitation he decided that they would help me get south into US Army hands.

Three days later they had a vehicle carrying troops on furlough and I was welcome to ride with them. I did a great deal of visiting into the next two days bidding my friends goodbye and obtaining names and addresses for future corresponding.

On the morning I was to depart, I had a lengthy and casual breakfast with Pa and Ma Hol and all of the family. I cannot relate too strongly how fortunate I was to grasp the Dutch language so quickly. It made all of visiting I did prior to my departure so thoroughly enjoyable. After breakfast I bid all of my friends a tearful goodbye. It was a truly heart-wrenching departure.

My mode of transportation south was very similar to the type vehicles we used for transportation on our 466th Bomber Group base. It was basically a 3/4 ton truck with a wide wheel base. It had a

canvas cover over the rear section and a padded bench for seating along each side. The benches were of sufficient length to seat 5 men comfortably and being as how we faced each other there was every opportunity to converse as we rode along. I presented the Canadians with a "thumbnail" sketch of my war experiences and did little speaking otherwise. I was content to set there and have these seasoned artillery and armored troops relate their war stories. The trip south was uneventful, other than the tales of war, for the only place we could see out was to the rear. Fortunately, we only had to travel from Steenwijk to Leige, Belgium when we made our first stop. We had a one hour layover so I went sightseeing. I had not walked but about ten minutes when I came across a Red Cross Club, I entered. There was a snack bar but my pockets were void of funds. I threw myself upon the mercy of the cashier, an American girl, and told her of my plight while showing my dog tags. She graciously agreed to let me have two donuts and a container of milk "on the house". While I sat partaking of my "free-loaded" food I noticed at a corner table a group of four officers, with wings, and six enlisted men also so adorned. I could but surmise that this must be a heavy bomber crew at "R & R" (Rest & Recreation). I approached their table and addressing the highest ranking officer, which would be the pilot, I told him I had been shot down the previous August and how the Canadians had liberated my town and had provided me with transportation to Leige. I then requested that they give me a lift on their bomber back to England. The pilot advised me he could not do this but that he would give me a lift, via truck out to the local Air Field where I could talk to the G-2 (Intelligence) Officer; this I agreed to do. While traveling to the Air Field I related to the crew my experiences (capsuled version) since being shot down last August 15. Upon arrival at the Air Field I was dropped off in front of the G-2 building and I entered same. I told the sergeant at the front desk of my situation and requested to see an officer. He left me, returned a minute later and led me into another office where I was introduced to a Major. We introduced ourselves to each other and I was asked to be seated. I related my story to the Major, again in abbreviated form. He then proceeded to carry on a casual conversation with me regarding army life and about my eight months evading capture. After about 8-10 minutes of conversing he said "O.K., you're GI". He didn't ask me any questions during the interrogation but that is what he was doing to me, interrogating!

The sergeant was then called in and the Major directed him to see that I was issued a uniform for I was still in my civilian clothing. Another soldier took me to the supply building. We entered and as we approached the issue counter the Buck Sergeant (three stripes) looked at me with a facial expression that I could only interpret as disdain. The soldier escorting me explained that I was a Tech Sergeant (five stripes) on a bomber crew that was shot down the previous August and had been evading capture with the Dutch underground. He was to issue me a complete outfit of GI clothing. The sergeant behind the counter broke his stern facial

expression, smiled and said "good, I thought you were another frog". "Frog" was the derogatory tag put upon the French by most of the GIs. In general, there was not much respect shown to the French by the Americans. Now for what is probably the most unbelievable part of my memoirs, I was issued a complete "class A" dress uniform and everything fit perfectly! I am not lying, it is true! Then another seemingly impossible event took place, I was escorted to the payroll office I filled out a short form and was presented with a half month's pay, \$104.00. How about that! I was then informed that I would be given transportation to southwest France to be under control of a unit at a RAMP (Recovered Allied Military Personnel) camp. I was directed to a barracks where I would spend two nights, departing for Le Havre, France at 9am on the second morning. It was now about 5pm (1700 hours) so I went to chow at 1800 and lounged about the base for the rest of the evening.

The following morning I prepared my toilette, dressed and took a bus into Leige. I returned to the Red Cross Club and paid for my milk and donuts. I contacted the cashier who had let me "free-load" the previous day. She was surprised that I had returned in uniform and to thank her. We talked for about ten minutes and I told her a very short version of my experiences, bid her goodbye again expressing my thanks for her consideration and departed.

After some fifteen minutes more of leisurely strolling I found myself in a busy business district of Leige. I approached a GI to ask directions but he could not speak english. This, even though he had on a US Army uniform less insignia. I then began to realize why the supply sergeant originally looked upon me unfavorably. I then sat down to do some people watching and it was quite a show. I do not know what their professions were but many of the "ladies" had multi-colored hair; purple, yellow, red, green, you name it and it was there in various combinations. I also had a man come up to me who offered to buy the shoes off my feet, I said "No Thank You!" It was the only pair I had and brand new. I then "got out of town", returning to the Air Field.

The next morning found me enjoying another truck ride, heading south for Le Havre. On the south west coast of France we pulled into one of the RAMP camps called "Lucky Strike"; they were all named after brands of cigarettes. It was at this camp where I really was taken back into the army. The administrative personnel took my statement and made me a new personnel folder and pay record and welcomed me back. There were not many activities available to pass away the time but the chow was very good. Because of the vast numbers of men passing through, it was necessary to eat while standing at special shelf tables fabricated for this purpose. After about a week at "Lucky Strike" we took another truck ride, this time in a flat bed trailer with wooden sides and canvas top. This was a before dawn trip.

I will point out here that the vast majority of the men at these RAMP camps had been POWS and were not in the best of health as yet. Dysentery was running rampant through these ex-POWS. As the truck was proceeding through Le Havre, headed for the coastal waters, a GI clear up front screams "Dysentery, make way" and heads for the rear of the truck jumping over GIs lying on the floor. The tailgate of the truck was about 6 feet high and there was an open area about 30 inches high between the top of the tailgate and the canvas top. As he ran toward the rear he was unfastening his pants. Upon reaching the tailgate he faced forward and pulled his pants and shorts down. While he was doing this, two GIs grasped him, one on each side, under the armpit and behind the knee and heaved him up so his butt was out over the tailgate and without any hesitation he made his deposit onto the street in Le Havre. This whole action took place with such precision that it appeared as though it was a practiced routine-very professionally performed. Upon arrival at the Port of Le Havre, we immediately boarded the US Army Transport Command Ship the USS George Washington. Little did I know said ship was to be my home for thirteen days. I would wager to say that approximately 90% of the GIs aboard this ship were ex-POWS and about 25% of them were still in ill health with the more seriously ill being quartered in a special section of the ship. Many of these men had been on POW forced marches as the allied forces advanced through Germany. It was common for them to remove their shoes and socks and walk about when given the opportunity to do so. The net result of this practice was thousands of cases of "athlete" or "trench" foot. The Germans did not have the medications or desire to treat this problem and the aggravated cases among a goodly portion of the men on the George Washington attested to this lack of treatment. Three or four times daily medics would come through and swab the feet of all affected with a red anti-fungus medication. These men wore only socks so as to aid healing - many were in very serious condition solely from trenchfoot. I made it a point to never walk about in my bare feet even wearing socks when showering. Showers were taken in salt water with a special soap. There was very little lather and the best I can say for this salt water shower is that it was better than no shower at all.

The chow system aboard ship was the same as at Camp Lucky Strike, get in a very long line (did not matter, there was no place to go), obtain your tray of food, stand up to eat and then return tray to "China Clipper" area. There were so many to be fed that there was only about two hours from the time one meal ended and the start of the next. After two days aboard at Le Havre, we set sail for home-OOPS, so we thought - we only went as far as Southampton in southern England and tied up for 3 more days of the same do nothing routine. The sleeping areas on the below decks were very stuffy (air wise) as can be imagined. Thus it was that some two to three hundred GIs hauled their small mattresses to the outside deck and slept under the stars, returning the mattresses to below decks by day; your truly was one of the first to fall into this routine.



After three days in Southhampton the convoy was complete and we set sail for the city of New York on about May 1, 1945.

The main method of passing time on the voyage was telling war stories. What with about 2,000 combat hardened vets aboard I became a very good listener and thoroughly enjoyed listening to the courageous and sometimes wacky exploits of these GIs. About the fourth day out to sea I heard that there was a small gambling casino on board, obtained information on its whereabouts and went to check it out. The casino consisted of a room about 40' x 60'. The games available were Black Jack, Roulette Table, and a Dice game where you bet on a number 1 - 12 and the dice were tossed by a flip of the wrist from one cone shaped basket to another to determine the winner. I watched the action but did not participate in same. There were also several poker tables under full usage and the amounts being bet were quite large. I was amazed that the army would set up a gambling room on a troop ship. I guess that the army in its somewhat limited wisdom decided that "boys will be boys" and would gamble someplace else so why not keep it under control. There were two libraries on board so reading proved to be a most popular pastime.

Keeping in mind the great number of POWS aboard the ship it is not surprising that the reaction to the announcement of VE day on May 7, 1945 solicited little reaction. I was napping below decks at approximately 1500 hours (3pm) when the announcement came over the public address system that Hitler had committed suicide and that representatives of the defeated Third Reich had signed unconditional surrender documents. I experienced an inner sigh of relief, expressed "Thank you, God" and rolled over to resume my nap. It was a very somber attitude on the part of the 30 to 40 other GIs in my area at the time - there were a few reserved expressions of joy but nary one cheerful outburst. Those that had been through the battles of all out war found nothing to celebrate. The non-combatants, primarily civilians, in Time Square and other victorious allied countries could play out the parts.

Our convoy consisted of approximately seven "Liberty Ships" (cargo ships built by Kaiser Shipbuilding of California), a navy cruiser (name unknown), the USS George Washington and two navy destroyer escorts. The Liberty Ships, unfortunately, carried no cargo and their bows were rising and falling with the ocean swells. This caused the stern of the ships to do the same. The result was that their screws (propellers) were only in the water and pushing the ships half the time. The effect of this action was that it took the convoy about three extra days to make the ocean crossing.

On the eve of the day we were to arrive in New York Harbor, I paid a final visit to the ships gambling casino. There was little action taking place at the gaming tables but there was a great deal of interest being shown to the only poker game taking place. After about five minutes of forward progress I was able to get within

viewing range of the table. There were four GIs playing and each had a "ton of money" in front of him. Evidently, they had over a period of ten days cleaned out all of the other players and were now having a "Grand Finale". They were playing 5 card draw and it was common for each player to have \$500.00 to \$1000.00 of his money in the pot; remember this was May of 1945 when "a buck was a buck". I only watched the game for about ten minutes and departed but I am sure that one or possibly two of those players left the ship the next day with a big wad of dough.

On May 14, 1945 the USS George Washington was berthed into the Port of New York and Technical Sergeant Frederick J. Gerritz was back in the USA. It took about three hours to disembark all of the ambulatory troops and get them into a semblance of a formation on the dock; all this while a military band played loudly to help confuse the situation. All the troops then marched columns of two along the dock and with a column left proceeded to and boarded a Pennsylvania RR passenger train. This train was electrically driven with the power source overhead. To this day, it is the fastest passenger train I have ridden on including Europe up to 1985. I truly believe we hit 100 mph as we headed for Camp Kilmer in New Jersey. It was a thrill ride to be sure! The train was an oddity for those days because of its length and the citizenry stopped to stare in disbelief. Almost all of the people and there were hundreds, realized it was a troop train and wildly waved to us; at 100 mph they did not have to wave for but a short time. An hour or so later we were at Camp Kilmer. There were railroad tracks to the Camp's supply building and the train went right onto the base and stopped to let us disembark. An hour later we were on our way to the mess hall for lunch; the time was near 1300. Once again, please recall that these men were predominately ex-POWs and had suffered through years of ill treatment in some cases. I must admit they deserved everything that could be done for them. The Army sure gave them a "good appreciate" this day. The chow line in this mess hall was super-colossal; it must have been 150 feet in length, conservatively speaking. There were ten entrees, potatoes presented in every way possible, every vegetable it seems that existed, numerous salads, fruits, breads and rolls, pastries, pies, cakes, jellos, ice cream, beverages galore, etc., etc. I will never see such an outlay of foodstuffs again of that I am sure. Everyone that was not prohibited from doing so due to medical reasons, gorged themselves. To this day in August 1993, whenever I recall this occasion and the fact that the Camp Kilmer Mess Hall Staff went all out for the benefit of these highly deserving ex-POWs, an emotional swelling occurs within me and I invariably shed a tear for these men had truly been through the proverbial HELL! After seeing them and hearing them relate their stories of horror I know I was truly blessed to have evaded capture.

The next four days we underwent further personnel and elaborate feeding processes. The fifth day found me once again aboard a troop train, this time bound for Fort Dix in New Jersey. We had

now been divided into much smaller groups. I teamed up with a Jerry Malvin, (formerly Malinowitz) also from Buffalo. We were at Fort Dix long enough to procure additional uniform items.

Two days after arriving at Fort Dix, Jerry and I had train tickets via the Pennsylvania RR out of Trenton, New Jersey to the city of New York and thence via the New York Central System out of Grand Central Station to Buffalo. We were also in possession of 60 day furloughs. After our furloughs, we had orders to report for R & R at the Army Air Corps occupied hotel on the boardwalk in Atlantic City, New Jersey for further assignment.

During my first day at Camp Kilmer I had phoned home and had talked to my sister Clara. She did a lot of crying and sobbing and also told me the Army had sent a telegraph advising that I was back into US Army control. They had also received the V-mail letter I had sent via the Canadian Army Postal Service. I surely did not want to walk in on my family and relatives unannounced.

As near as I can recall it was approximately June 1, 1945 when Jerry Malvin and I began our trek to Buffalo. We departed Fort Dix via commercial bus for Trenton. The bus stopped right at the Pennsylvania RR station in Trenton which turned out to be very advantageous for us. Entering the station we walked up to a ticket agent and requested the time for the next train to the city of New York. He advised us of the track number and said the next train was scheduled to depart in about three minutes. We thanked him and took off on the run. We arrived at the appropriate track number, quickly checked for New York as its destination and resumed our run this time toward the front of the train. At the first open train car door I shouted to the porter "New York!" He replied "That's where we're going"; Jerry and I climbed aboard, the train started to move and the porter closed the door - talk about making a good connection. Upon our arrival in New York we had to travel from the Pennsylvania Station to the New York Central Station. We exited the Penn Station and walked up to a cab that was standing nearby. I told the driver we wanted to go to Grand Central, we hopped in and away we went - the trip took about ten minutes and we paid our fare and headed for the entrance to Grand Central.

We once again inquired of an agent the track number and time of departure for Buffalo. He stated the track number and also that the train was due out at that very moment; with a shout of "Thanks" we took off running once more. Reaching the designated track we ran at our fastest speed toward the front of the train - it started moving. A door just ahead of us opened up and we jumped aboard. How about that, we had actually cut some time off of our previous trip's connection - about 3 seconds I would wager. After about 400 plus miles we arrived in Buffalo; I bid Jerry "Goodbye" and boarded a bus for downtown Buffalo. At Shelton Square I boarded the Riverside bus and I was on my way to my home in the Town of Tonawanda. A half hour or so later I got off the bus at Vulcan and

Tonawanda streets and walked the block and a half to 108 Huetter Street.

I entered the outer rear door (we never locked doors in those days) and climbed the stairs to the upper flat - it was 4am. I entered my home and proceeded through the kitchen and into the hallway leading to the bedroom area at the rear of the house. A light was on and Clara was standing at a baby crib with her back to me and was holding my godchild Mary Ellen ( I had become her Godfather through use of a proxy). I softly said "Hello sister". She turned around and we were aglow with emotion. She laid Mary Ellen into the crib and we shared a very lengthy embrace and a deluge of tears on both of our parts. We then had a lengthy talk as Mary Ellen went back to sleep - great Godchild.

It was now after 5am. Clara had related to me that my cousin Richard Biggie who lived downstairs had been killed by a Japanese sniper on Iwo Jima an island in the Pacific. He was a member of the US Marine Corps. My Aunt Mary, his mother, was an early riser and so I decided to go downstairs immediately to greet and console her on her loss.

Upon reaching her kitchen door I could see the light under the door - her first chore each morning was boiling her coffee in a large porcelain coffee pot - she brewed the real stuff. I knocked gently and opened the door. As I entered the kitchen, she turned around and I said "Hello Aunt Mary, I made it back" - the tears flowed from both of us as we went into our Aunt/Nephew embrace. While holding her close I whispered softly into her ear "I am so sorry about what happened to Richie" (this is what we all called him).

My Aunt then began to sob heavily. After what seemed to me an eternity of emotional display we both gathered a degree of composure, wiped the tears from our faces and sat down at the kitchen table - where else, 95% of the visiting at Aunt Mary's was done in the kitchen. I talked very little about my experiences, allowing her to talk at length about Richie's death and where her other sons were at the time, Clem, Jim and Joe were also in the Armed Forces at this time. After about an hour, I embraced her once again and went back upstairs. It should be pointed out that my Aunt Mary could be looked upon as my second mother. My mother had died when I was seven years of age and while our family was living in the flat above Aunt Mary and Uncle Henry. My Dad married Lena Biggie and his sister Mary married Lena's brother Henry Biggie. It was a Brother/Sister and Brother/ Sister act.

During my 60 day furlough I had emotional reunions with my sisters, brothers as well as many aunts, uncles and cousins galore. About two weeks after I returned home I bought a railroad ticket and departed for St. Louis and thence Madison, Illinois to see a certain Loretta Hollenbeck. I had previously made arrangements to see her. So it was that on about June 15, 1945 I boarded the New

York Central train out of Buffalo, destination St. Louis, Mo. and ultimately Madison, Illinois.

After visiting for a few days at 2020 McCasland Avenue, Lauretta and I departed the St. Louis area and travelled via train, to Buffalo and thence to the Town of Tonawanda. A good time was had by all as she met all of the relatives and she and I were wined and dined over a period of two weeks. About half way through her visit we took a walk one evening down to the parkside on the Niagara River. As we were seated overlooking the river and watching the power and sail boats going to and fro I proposed marriage to her. It was a most happy and momentous occasion for she accepted my proposal. A few days later I saw my fiancée off on the train for her return to Madison, Illinois; she was now adorned with an engagement ring.

At the end of my 60 day furlough I boarded a train and went to Atlantic City, New Jersey, for two weeks of "Rest and Recreation" and for further assignment. Being wartime, the military forces had taken over possession and operation of all of the hotels on the Boardwalk sans one. All of the military personnel at these hotels were combat veterans. The one I stayed in was occupied by all Army Air Corps combat veterans. The rooms were plush and I had a private room, one bed. At the maximum there were only two beds and two men to a room. All the meals were served in the main dining room of the hotel. The tables seated four men and were covered with real table clothes (this is the Army Mr. Jones?). We were able to order from three entrees and the meals were served by waiters. Knowing that "boys will be boys" the Army did not allow any waitresses I guess. In the lobby the military had installed a between meals snack area. Almost any thing your stomach desired was available for consumption - candy, fruit, ice cream galore, sandwiches, nuts, pies, cakes, you name it and it was there. Keep in mind that among these combat veterans were once again many ex-POWs and so the military went "all out" to see that they were well taken care of; they deserved every bit of this special care.

The Boardwalk was in full operation at this time and thousands of people, predominately military, traversed the Boardwalk almost every hour of the day and night. I had fortunately been placed back on the regular payroll and also received all of my back pay, \$1876.00, what a wad! Being "Thrifty Fritzi" I had deposited the back pay into a bank account and was just working with my regular monthly amount which I recollect was about \$120.00 a month (remember this was August of 1945 when a dollar had a great deal of purchasing power). My favorite past time on the Boardwalk was a Skee-Ball machine. The machine was about thirty feet long and forty inches wide. This forty inch flat surface rose at about a 10° angle for about ten feet and then rose at about 30° to a group of wood rings that were about six inches high. It was similar to a rifle target - the smaller the ring you bowled the ten inch circumference balls into the higher you scored. I became a friend

of one of the other men in my hotel and we would spend hours at these machines. We had both been bowlers in our pre-service days and so we won a lot of free games for the high scores we rolled. The Army provided swimming trunks and upon exiting the hotel all we needed to do was walk across the Boardwalk down about 12 steps and we were on the beach of the Atlantic Ocean - what a deal!

At some time during my stay at the hotel I had a reassignment conference. Because of my being shot down and evading capture for 8 1/2 months, I was given the option of going to any Army Air Corps station I desired for further duty. Needless to say, I chose Scott Field, Illinois. Why Scott Field? I had been through Radio School there and also knew the area well. There were two major league ball teams in St. Louis, the Cardinals and the Browns; admission was free for men in uniform. Oh yes, I had recently become engaged to a young lady named Laretta who happened to live near Scott Field.

Upon my arrival at Scott Field I was informed that I could choose to be an MP or paint interiors of military housing while awaiting discharge which would be about five to six weeks later. Personally, I thought this was a pretty disgusting way to treat combat veterans (there were about thirty of us). I chose to be a painter for I could not see myself as an MP. I went to supply to get some fatigue outfits (work clothes) but they did not have my size or even close; you could tell the war in Europe had ended - already cutting back. I reported to the job site and the civilian in charge told me not to come back until they issued me fatigues; I had reported to work in our "class A" dress uniform. Later that day I learned that a group of about thirty combat veterans had taken up residence in a previously empty barracks on a corner of the base, right at the fence line; I packed what gear I had and moved into my new home.

This was the life! We would get up about 9am, prepare our toilette and head for the mess hall at 11am. I usually ate a very small lunch for after eating and armed with a permanent pass (which we all were) I would head for St. Louis on a bus and arrive in St. Louis in time to get over to Reliable Clothing on Lucas Street and take Laretta to lunch; I liked her company. After lunch, I would usually team up with some other GIs and head for Sportsman's Park on Grand Avenue for a ball game. There was a game every day because both the Cardinals and Browns played in the same ballpark. It was a good life. Oh yes, there were also church groups that had hospitality centers where we could get a free meal if we desired; I took these meals on infrequent occasions. After the ballgame, I would catch a street car back to downtown St. Louis in time to meet Laretta leaving work and accompany her home on an inter-suburban street car. I would usually depart the Hollenbeck residence about 9pm and head back to Scott Field.

Every three or four days I would go to the supply department to get

fatigues; they never had a size to fit me properly. Up to the day I was discharged I never got a set of fatigues and never picked up a paint brush; I chose the right job.

I continued to live the good life with about thirty other men, until I was discharged from active duty on October 16, 1945 at Scott Field, Illinois. I was now a "Ruptured Duck." The Army issued a small pin that fit into a hole on the lapel of your uniform to show that you had been discharged. The emblem was actually an American Eagle with his wings spread; the GIs referred to it as the "Ruptured Duck". Upon separation from the service each man received \$300.00 and a train ticket back to his home of record (place from which he entered service). So ended the Army Air Corps career of Frederick James Gerritz; length of service 2 years, 8 months and 27 days.

On November 17, 1945 in Madison, Illinois, Laurette Hollenbeck and Frederick Gerritz were married; "They Lived Happily Ever After".

Frederick J. Gerritz





**SECTION FOUR**

## A Successful Escape

(A Recollection of Events by Albert Kok)

On Tuesday, the 15th of August, 1944 there was a big air fight over Vledder. American bombers on their way back from bombing Germany were surprised by German hunters at 1:15pm.

Aircraft were shot down on both sides. Some crew members died. One of the survivors was Fred J. Gerritz, a crew member of the 466th Bomb Group. Gerritz, who is 63 years of age now landed by parachute near Havelte Airfield, where he hid himself. In the night he began to walk, which brought him near Vledder.

He saw on a road sign that he was in Holland, which made him very happy. Gerritz hid in an oat field belonging to Geert Kok. Geert and Albert Kok (I worked for Geert then) and daughter Aaltje decided to mow their oats.

On the 16th of August when we were drinking thee (tea) in the afternoon I said "there is something moving in the oat". We all looked in that direction but we saw nothing. We thought that it was a dog or just my imagination and we paid no more attention to the matter.

We mowed until Geert had to milk the cows. Aaltje and I had to pile up the mowed oat. When we were standing next to the unmowed oat and I picked up some oat, I saw a man who was on his knees. The man made a move indicating that he wanted me to come to him. I said to Aaltje "look over there" and I went to the man. The man said "zoom, zoom", and said with his hands that he had fell out of the air. I nodded my head to make clear that I understood what he was trying to say because I spoke no english. He showed me a map and pointed to Assen, Meppel and Dieverbrug. Then he pointed to a spot west of Dieverbrug and looked at me. I nodded my head again because he was right. After some more hand language I went back to Aaltje, who was scared. We had some meat and thee left and we decided to give it to the pilot. Then we left the pilot alone and finished our work. We decided to tell our families about it and to think about what to do.

When we were talking about it with our brother and sister-in-law, Geert got the idea of asking Mr. Dupont for help. What we didn't know, was the Mr. Dupont was in the "resistance" (het ver zet).

Mr. Dupont said "what do you want with this man?" and Geert said "we wanted to ask you the same question". Dupont told us the pilot could get away, but if something went wrong the Germans would kill us all and would burn down the house to scare the rest of the village; not a comforting thought but we decided to do it. We got an english written note (written by son Oekele) which said that the "underground" would pick up the pilot in the night.

When we got home and our sister-in-law heard about our plans and the possible consequences she panicked and begged Geert to have the man for what he was, which we could understand. We could bring him some food, but to bring him a note was too dangerous - according to her.

After a long discussion we concluded that the risk was not so big and I went to the pilot with something to eat and the note. After the pilot had read the note he destroyed it and buried it.

The next morning, the 17th of August we went to milk the cows and were relieved. We did not speak about what had happened. The pilot was gone and the case closed. But we did not know that the underground had not succeeded in picking up the pilot that night.

That afternoon Geertje and Geert were not home. Mr. Dupont came to Aaltje to ask where Albert was. Aaltje told him that Albert was plowing on the Vledderes. While Mr. Dupont was with Aaltje, two men of the underground were standing on the Wapserweg. Mr. Dupont could see them so that they could find a safe place when there was something gone wrong. These two men, Joop Tuut and Jan Koning, had placed their bicycles upside down to pretend that they were broken. When they found out where I was, they paid me a visit on the Vledderes. They didn't say who they were and asked if I was Albert Kok. When they asked where the pilot was I was shocked; I thought the pilot was already gone. I suspected that they were traitors and I thought about fleeing or fighting. I thought "you will have to be very good to get me alive!" I said "you just keep on talking, I know nothing".

The two men then convinced me that they were on my side, but then they could not find the pilot. They asked if I wanted to look for him. I went to the oat field on the Wapserweg. While I was going there Mr. Dupont passed me on his bicycle. While passing me he said "everything is O.K. Kok, but they may not see me here". Then my mind was at peace. The pilot was not on the agreed spot. What I did find was the spot where he spent the night.

He had spread out some oat on the ground and piled some oat to block the wind. He probably got worried because the promised help had not shown up and went to another place. "Hello, Hello" I heard something out of a pit near Gerrit Prop's house. It was an emotional moment when I saw the pilot again but we had to act quickly. He had to get out of there, but not in uniform of course.

We had to cross the road Vledder-Wapse. That is when we went to the family of Albert Trompetter who lived nearby. After explaining everything they decided the pilot could stay in their house. Coincidentally, Berend Mulder was present (he was with the underground also) and he helped too. Son Levert gave me an overall, wooden shoes, a cap and two big forks. In this disguise, the pilot and I (he had put on the clothes in the pit) walked into

the back door of the farm of the Trompetters. Son Levert had been watching and no one had seen us. The Trompetters gave us food and the pilot washed himself. The Trompetters gave the pilot a civilian suit. Nothing but good from the Trompetters.

It was a big relief that the pilot could speak english again with Berend Mulder; he got some hope again. There was a little panic when a German truck stopped at the farm but they only needed some water for their radiator. That night we saw the pilot for the last time at Geert's house. He came there with three men of the underground. Nothing but good for these men.

Until 1980 we didn't know what had happened to the pilot. That is when he came to us to "thank us". We heard that Joop Tuut and Jan Koning brought Fred Gerritz to different "onderdijk-adressen" (hiding places). Fred had stayed with Fred Stegink who lived near the market place (paint store, now De Vos); the Bennik Family in Witte Paarden, Mrs. Thelinss Van Laanzicht who lived in De Bult and then to his final hiding place with Willem Hol De Barrs in the Eese where he stayed for eight months together with Willem Hol's son Teun and another American.

I want to say also on behalf of Fred Gerritz, that we owe a lot to these Great Hollanders who made this escape possible. Especially the Hol family with whom Gerritz stayed for eight months, all were very brave. We also whole heartedly thank the families Trompetter and Kok. Their aid was of the utmost importance.

Albert Kok, Vledder



**SECTION FIVE**

**WAR HAPPENINGS ABOVE NORTH OVERIJSEL**  
The Catastrophe by Steenwijk (City)

The News mentioned on August 15, 1944, new landings of allies at Cannes and Toulon (South France), supporting the battle in West France. The battle was heavy in Bretagne. The Russians reached East Pruisen. The American Air Force, stationed at several different airbases in England, concentrated on the German air bases in Germany as well as in the Netherlands and in Belgium. At this particular date they also focused on Soesterberg. There was not much damage, but many Dutch from Uthoven and Den Dolder were killed. That day the big bombers went to an airbase near Bremen in Germany. More than 1000 bombers (4-motors) went that morning at 9 a.m., leaving different airbases in England. Among these were the bombers of the Bomb group 466, which were stationed at Attlebridge. This took place under protection of the Lockheed fighter planes. Not much is known about the flight to Vechta airbase. The flight was entirely over the sea, via the Doggersbank and the Wadden islands and about 12 noon they flew over the German border (post). This German airbase became totally destroyed with no resistance from the Germans whatsoever.

SMOKE COLUMN

According to the diary of one of the men, a smoke column of about 2 kilometers could be seen from a distance of 100 km. Till above Drente everything stayed calm, but close to Havelte, hell broke loose; it was 1 o'clock. To be able to explain what happened then, we will leave the returning American bombers for a minute and see what is happening on the German side. The Germans were supposed to have some secret weapons and the Dutch were laughing, thinking that the Germans were bluffing. Germany was bound to lose. But Germany indeed had them, the V-I and V-II. They also had airplanes but had to keep them on the ground because of fuel shortage. They also had available the 2-motor Messerschmidt 262.

We are going back now to the Americans on August 15, 1944. Through the diary of a survivor, Lieutenant R. K. Borst, we learned what had happened. The view was clear above North Netherlands and no enemy was to be seen. Slowly on the Americans were less alert and they were getting sleepy, the worst was over.

They reached Havelte, the 466th. Bomb group and that is where it happened. 20 German fighters flew through the group of American planes and they were going down everywhere. The Americans who died there never knew what exactly happened. First everybody thought that the Germans had used their Me. 262 (Messerschmidt) for the first time. But this was not the case. The airbase was not equipped for a big plane like that because the runways were too short.

### HORRIBLE

The Germans mounted rockets on 109 Me. fighter planes. Surrounded by the horrible sound of these rockets the German fighters could fly up, fast and straight up and attack the American formation from under and scatter them. The result was terrible for the bomber group 466. Burning and in pieces they came down, but it is better to hear this from one of the survivors Harry A. Clark (Sergeant). He was on the bomber Consolidated Liberator B24. This plane had the name of "Stardust" and that was probably No. 41-29449. At 1 o'clock Bob Lehman reported 109 German fighters and he tried to shoot them (salvo) but no success. The Germans came back from the right, more salvos, one of the Germans got hit and dove down, followed by a second one. The Stardust shot 2 German fighters down and the total of destroyed German planes came to 10. Right after that the Stardust got hit. The men left by parachute. These were Sergeant Harry A. Clark, Lieutenant Leslie, Sergeant Bob Lehman and Sergeant Willie Lowen. The Stardust came down near the Aa about 2 kilometers south of the road Steenwijk Frederiksoord in front of the Christian school in Nyensleek still in Drente. One of the German planes also came down in front of the Christian school in Nyensleek, about 200 meters south of the road. At the same time the tail of Harry Clark's plane came down at Wapserveer.

These men were not the only ones who died that day. A second bomber was hit. Also this bomber was of the 466 B.G. and of 784 Bomber squadron. The "Stardust" was of the 786 Bomb-squadron and was marked U8 and a letter L in a circle. The second plane which came down was the Consolidated Liberator B 24, H, 15, No. 42-52597, letter W, Squadron mark T9. The name was "Lady Lightning".

The pieces of the Lady Lightning were scattered over the farms Schippers and Potiek on the leyweg in the Gieterse of Verllaat polder. Four men lost their lives. The other six saved their lives by using the parachutes: one of them got away running in the direction on Vledder, this was Technical Sergeant Frederick Gerritz. The other ones were taken prisoner. Talking to the family Shippers, they told us that the plane came down in pieces.

In the tail section of the "Lady Lightning" they found the bodies of Staff Sergeant Robert R. Abbott, Staff Sergeant Jerome Samburg and Staff Sergeant Lowell D. Stiles. They were buried at Havelte and later the bodies were brought over to Maargraten.

#### NOTE

Maargraten is a big beautiful cemetery in Southern Holland wherein are buried many of the American casualties of World War II.

And still the fight was not over yet. Right then another bomber was hit, this was the Consolidated Liberator B24, H, 15/CD No. 41-787, 466 B. G. (letter L). This plane came down near the canal



Thy/Gelderinger. Three men died, they also were buried at Kerkbuurt. Seven survived and most of them were taken prisoner. One man escaped with help of Dutch people, Robert K. Borst. Many people helped him, jeopardizing their own lives.

We like to remember the names of some brave men who risked their lives many times to help the allies (Americans) Mr. Bol, Mr. Heerschop, Mr. Bisschop and Mr. John De Vries. They did what they did out of a sense of duty. We regret that we don't have the complete list of the names of the men who were on the bombers. But we know that the 1<sup>st</sup> pilot of the Liberator of Robert Borst was 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant R. Harrington. All the men who died in this plane crash were buried at Kerkbuurt. They got rid of the remains of this plane in 1977.

The 4<sup>th</sup> and last bomber crashed down in Nijstrijne (County Wester Lingwerd). This was the Consolidated Liberator B24, H, 25, VO No. 42-95157 also of the 466 B.G. and of 786 B-Squadron. Six men died and were buried in Wolvega; three were taken prisoner and one escaped. Two American Lockheed planes were shot down that day. One was the Lockheed "Lightning" P38, J, 42-28376 of the Fighter Group 479. The pilot was James L. Wallaceno O. 75823 T43-44. The Lieutenant died and was buried temporarily in Havelte. Another plane was hit and came down in South Wolde. This was the Lockheed "Lightning" P38, J. 44-23169. The pilot was Captain Turner. He survived by using a parachute and was shot in his leg. Both planes took off from the airbase at Wattisham, England and belonged to 479 F. G.

That day, at Havelte, nine German Me-109 fighters were shot down. In a few minutes there were killed, forty-five men and nine fighters (German).

If anyone, who was there at that time, knows more about this battle we will be anxious to hear about it or give more information to the ones concerned with it. We apologize if we did not mention all the names involved in the good work of helping the good cause and admire all the ones who worked together in this war against the Germans.

Author Unknown



**SECTION SIX**

## Post Scripts:

In August of 1980, Lauretta and I travelled to Frankfurt, Germany to visit our son, Paul, who was working in the town of Euskerchen near Bonn. Paul drove us to Steenwijk, Holland. During our three days in the Steenwijk/Vledder/Steenwijkerwold area I was able to visit once again with just about all of the Nederlanders who had contributed to my successful evasion of capture by the Germans. Among them were Albert Kok (my first contact), Jan (Joop) Tuut (my second contact), Tuenis Hol, Corry Hol, Jan Von Vollenhoven and his wife Janneke and Aaltje Evelveld Kok (my first food provider in Holland). It should be pointed out that my primary, long term host and hostess, Willem and Wijntje Hol were at this time deceased.

At the beginning of this visit we made the acquaintance of Helma Hol, daughter of Tuenes and Corry. Helma is a Kindergarten teacher, is fluent in english, and was our chief interpreter. Opposite the Town Hall in Vledder is a large boulder upon which is mounted a bronze plaque. Upon this plaque is inscribed the names of some ten allied airmen who died in the immediate area. Included thereon was John Suchiu, my pilot. I was told that his body was found in a nearby field with his chute unopened. I can but surmise that just as he bailed out of our aircraft the explosion occurred and the concussion from the explosion rendered him unconscious, resulting in his death.

On our return trip to Bonn from Steenwijk, we stopped at Maargraten in the south of Holland. Maargraten is the location of a major cemetery for allied military personnel killed in action in World War II. The records in the Administrative Office listed casualties by military organization. Under the 466<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group I could find none of my crew listed. I was informed by a member of the cemetery staff that if someone's name was not listed the body has been disinterred and sent back to the United States for re-burial. I knew this to be the case of my buddy, and tail gunner, Robert Abbott, for I had visited his parents in Findlay, Ohio after my return from overseas and had been given the opportunity to view his grave site in Findlay. Thus all four crewmen killed in action John Suchiu, pilot; Robert Abbott, Tail Gunner; Jerome Samburg, Ball Turret Gunner and Lowell Stiles, Waist Gunner were all now laying at rest in their home towns.

In the summer of 1985 our son Paul presented Lauretta and me with two first class tickets, via Trans World Airlines, from Los Angeles to Amsterdam. In August of 1985, we took a three week vacation in the Netherlands. We rented a Volkswagen GTI in Amsterdam and took a casual tour of the Netherlands. While visiting with Jan Tuut we came upon the subject of the note which was delivered to me by Albert Kok. If you recall it stated in part "destroy this note and bury it." As Jan Tuut and I were discussing the note, I reached into my pocket, pulled out my wallet, opened same and said "do you want to see your note?" Jan's mouth opened and eyes lit up in

surprise and shock; I had not destroyed the note? I then began to grin and closed my wallet; he regained his composure and we both had a good long laugh.

It was on this trip that a good friend, Teunis Hol, passed away. Tuen was the son of Willem (Pa) Hol.

Also on this trip Laretta and I were able to spend a complete day with Jan Von Vollenhoven and wife Janneke. The day was capped off with the four of us enjoying a beautiful dinner at a unique restaurant in Steenwijk.

While Laretta and I were staying at the Steenwijkerwold Hotel and due to the intervention of Jan Tuut, I met Jan Mennink. This young man had undertaken the task of assembling a history of the 466<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. He had brought to our meeting a satchel full of both German and United States war documents. Many of these documents had been classified by the U.S. but had since been declassified and made available for research. Jan gave me a complete set of documents, many of German origin listed our crew by position and whether dead or POW. I was listed as Garretts, Radioman, disposition unknown. I am most grateful to Jan Mennink for presenting me with this interesting and authentic data.

On this trip Laretta and I were invited to a gathering of many of my friends in the Vledder area. The gathering was in the conference room at the Vledder City Hall. At this time the mayor of the town presented me with a plaque upon which was mounted the coat of arms of Gemeente Vledder. I also was presented with a map of Northwest Drenthe by Lambertus Lambregts. He had laid out and marked all of the locations where aircraft and flyers, both U.S. and German, had come down via parachute or crashed on August 15, 1944. In addition, "Bert" had prepared a neatly typewritten legend and explanation sheet setting forth the type aircraft that had crashed and the names of the men, when known, who were within each aircraft. Also denoted were the locations and names, once again when known, of the parachutists who came down onto Holland that day. This map was a most welcome addition to my WWII memorabilia.

The day after this reception at the Vledder Town Hall, Laretta and I took an auto trip around Vledder and Havelte with Jan Tuut as our driver and guide. Our translator on this trip was Frens Trompetter, grandson of Frens and Janna Trompetter. During this drive Jan drove us around the area that during WWII had been the German Airbase at Havelte. Jan pointed out revetments where the Germans had parked their fighter aircraft. In addition, he was able to show us the place where the active German runway had been located. At the end of the auto tour Laretta and I expressed our thanks and appreciation to Jan and Frens for a most complete and highly informative afternoon of travel.

That evening after dinner, in the privacy of our hotel room, I unfolded and laid out the battle detail map that Bert Lambregts had

presented to me. Detailed upon this map was the active runway at the German Airbase at Havelte. In addition, there was also shown the location of another runway and taxi-strips that were under construction. Recalling that I had parachute landed only some one-half mile north of the active runway and noting on the map the location of the under construction runway, a thoroughly amazing fact occurred to me. When I ended my parachute descent and made contact with the soil of Holland I had actually landed within the perimeter of the German Airbase at Havelte. I had landed upon the enemy's fighter aircraft airbase and had succeeded in evading capture. I can but deem this event of my life as a God granted miracle.

Dwight D. Eisenhower as General of the Allied Armies in Europe deemed it fitting to present "Certificates of Gratitude" to those members of the various countries' underground organizations who risked their lives, and their family's, by giving aid to allied military personnel. I am delighted to report that Willem Hol and Geert Kok were recipients of these certificates. The certificates were prepared at the behest of and signed personally by General Dwight D. Eisenhower.

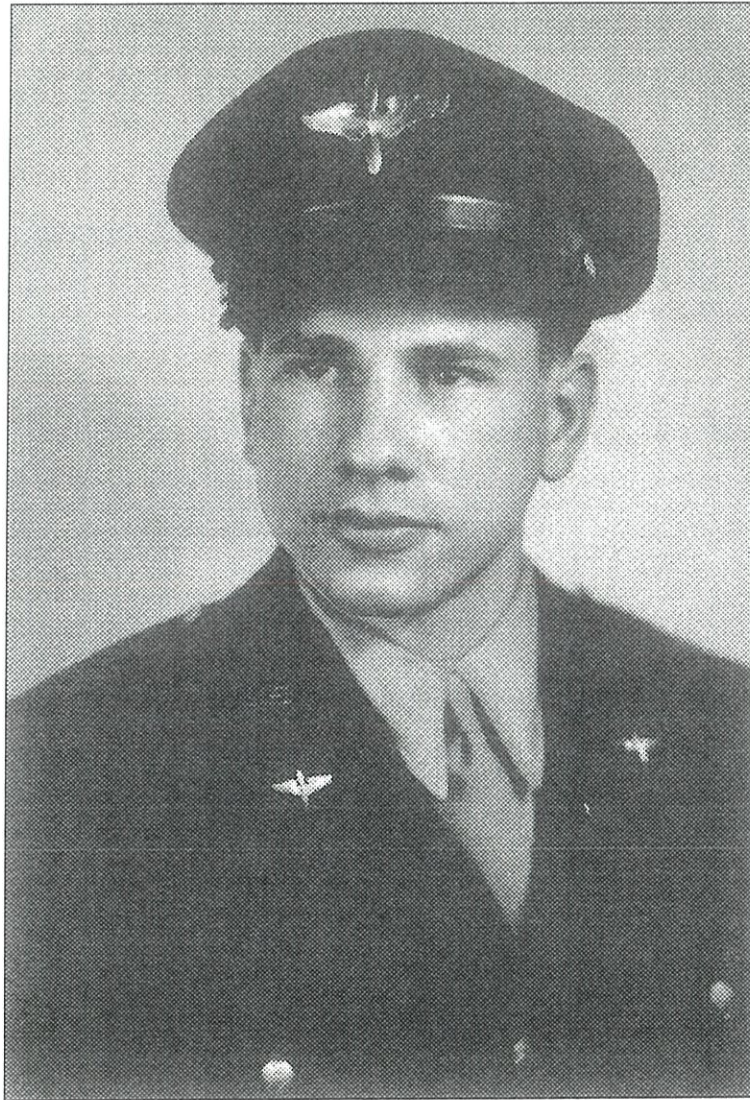
Further, Queen Julianna of the Netherlands likewise deemed it fitting to honor her fellow citizens who risked their lives in aiding the Allies in defeating the German Hordes that invaded their country. William Hol was a recipient of the Queen Julianna Tribute. Also so honored was my number one underground contact Jan (Joop) Tuut.



**SECTION SEVEN**







Frederick J. Gerritz, Sr.



Laretta Hollenbeck



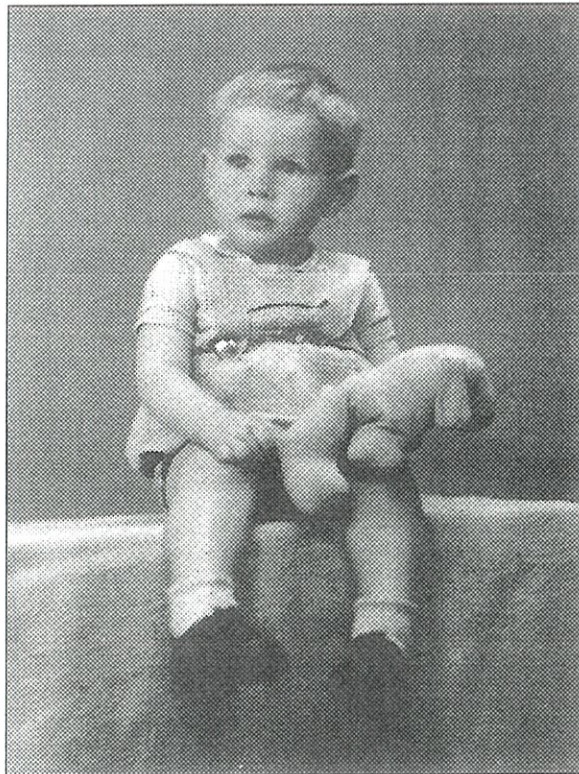
Geert and Geertje Kok



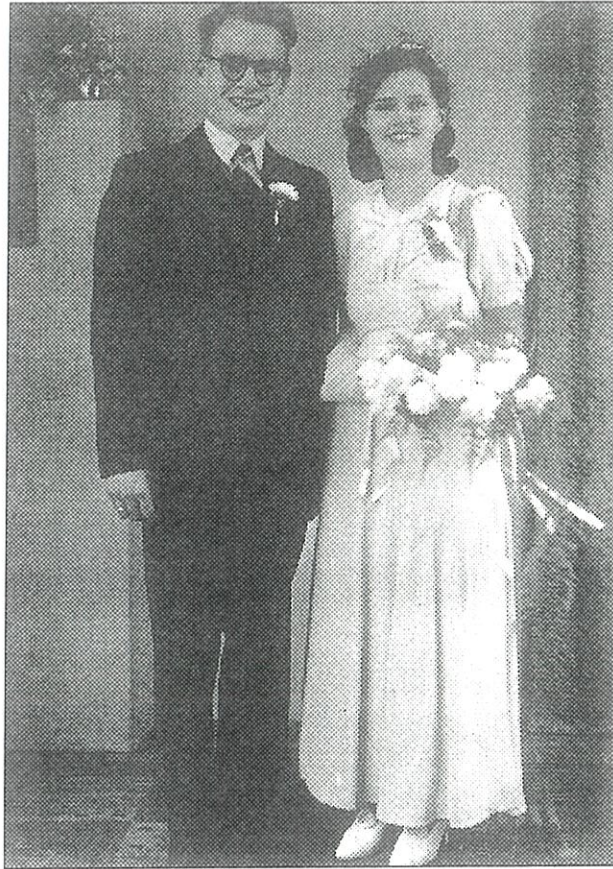
Aaltje Kok



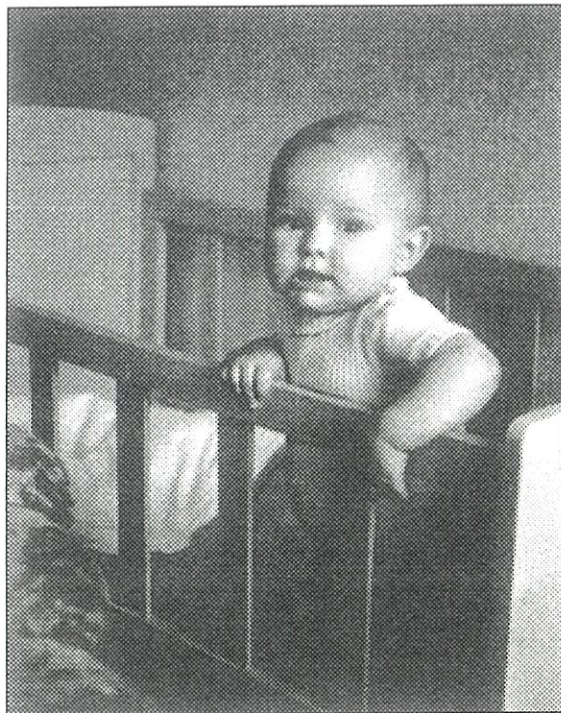
Klasse and Kobus



Wisse



Teunis and Corry Hol



Wim



Fokke Hol



Reinder Dolstra

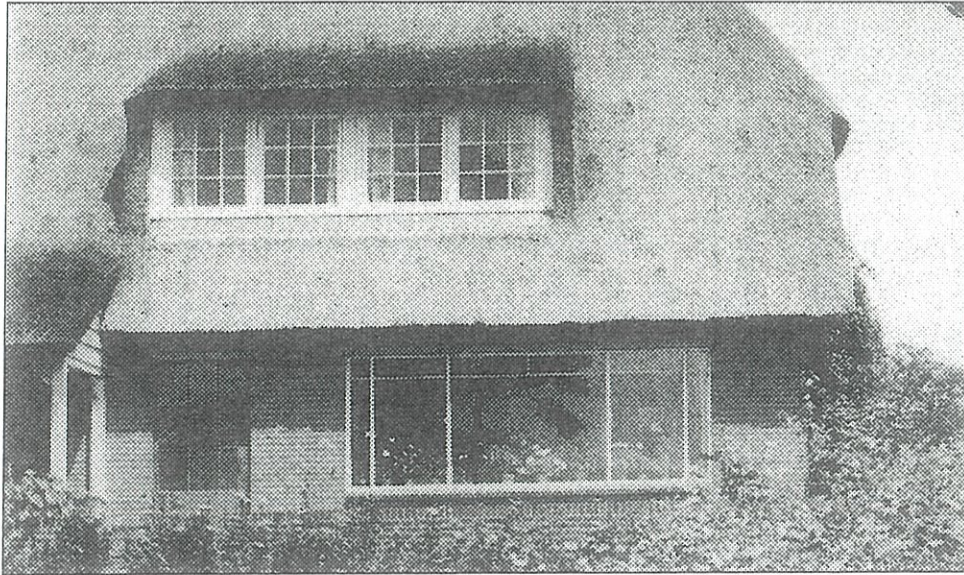


The Family Bennik  
Lisa, Theo, Anne Marie, Antoon, Nico  
Harry, Father, Femia, Mother

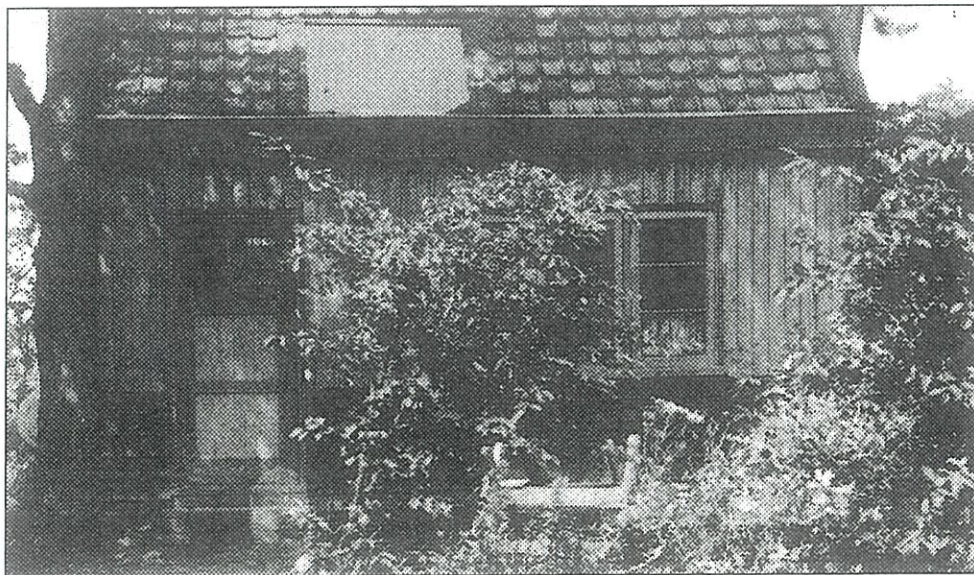


Harry Bennik





Residence of Willem and Wijntje Hol



My Home in Holland



Willem and Wijntje Hol  
Pa and Ma Hol



Willem Hol with Max



Jan (Joop) Tuut

Pictured after World War II in uniform of Major of Dutch Troops; also as officer of the organized Underground. During World War II Jan took care of and provided hiding places for many Dutch people who did not want to work in and for Germany. He also provided the same assistance to Allied Airmen forced down onto Holland. Jan also took part in raids on distribution offices at great danger to his life, to obtain coupons which were required to buy clothing and other provisions for the Dutch citizens in hiding.

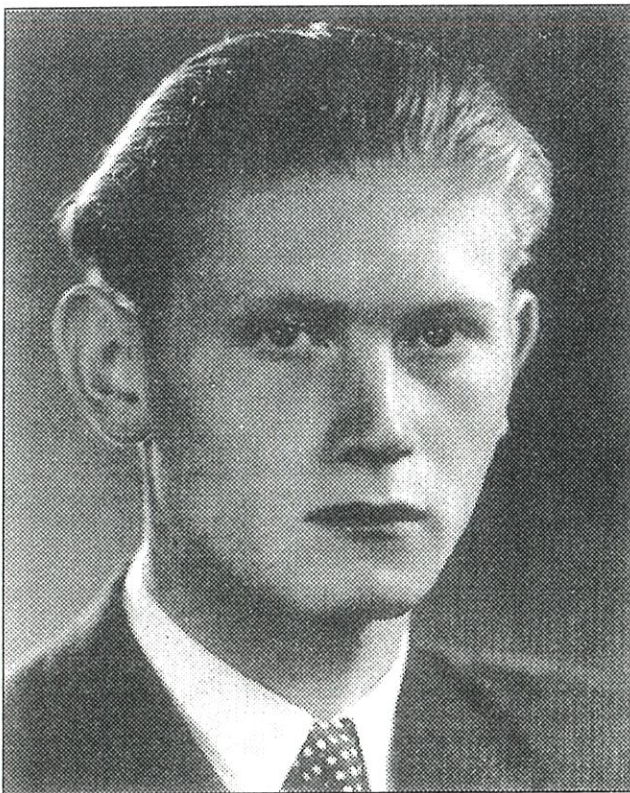


Tiny Tuut

Tiny was a courier for the Dutch Underground during World War II. On many occasions she would travel 100 miles or more, by bicycle, to obtain clothing with stolen coupons provided by the Underground. The clothing obtained was given to her fellow citizens in hiding as well as Allied Airmen forced down onto Holland.



Family Trompetter  
Frens, Janna, Levert, Catarina, Albert  
Children of Frens and Janna



Levert Trompetter



Albert and Margie Kok

