

The Lost Diaries of War

Volunteers are helping forgotten Dutch diarists of WWII to speak at last. Their voices, filled with anxiety, isolation and uncertainty, resonate powerfully today.

By [Nina Siegal](#) and [Josephine Sedgwick](#) April 15, 2020



Anne Frank listened in an Amsterdam attic on March 28, 1944, as the voice of the Dutch minister of education came crackling over the radio from London. “Preserve your diaries and letters,” he said.

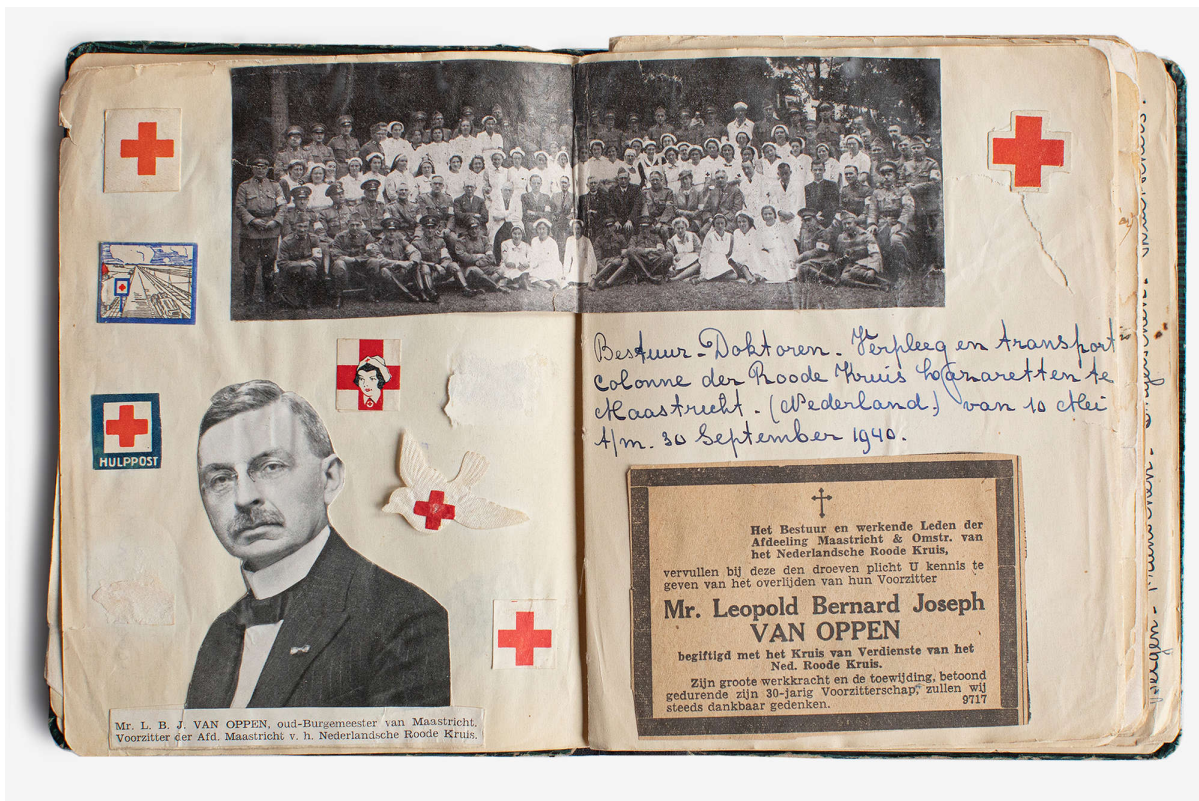
Frank was not the only one listening.

Thousands of Dutch people had been recording their experiences under German occupation since the Nazi invasion four years earlier. So the words of the minister, part of a government trying to operate from exile in England, resonated.

“Only if we succeed in bringing this simple, daily material together in overwhelming quantity, only then will the scene of this struggle for freedom be painted in full depth and shine,” the minister, Gerrit Bolkestein, said.

Frank responded by setting aside “Kitty,” the diary she had created as a personal refuge, and beginning a revised version called “The Secret Annex,” which she hoped to publish.

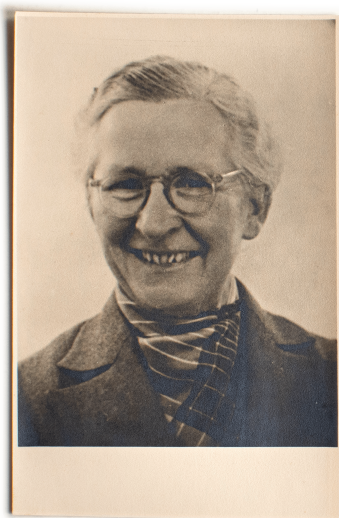
Other diarists persevered too, and after the country was liberated in May 1945, they showed up at the National Office for the History of the Netherlands in Wartime, with their notebooks and letters in hand. More than 2,000 diaries were collected, each a story of pain and loss, fear and hunger and, yes, moments of levity amid the misery.



But unlike Frank's diary, most of these accounts never surfaced again. Scholars read them once to inventory them, then shelved them — powerful but mute witnesses to the horrors of war. Now, though, the Dutch have launched an effort to transcribe the handwritten or typed pages into digital documents, ready for posting on the archive's website. More than 90 have already been fully transcribed.

“The most valuable diaries are the ones where they wrote about their own feelings, or conversations they had on the street or with family, or how they felt about the persecution of the Jews,” said Rene Kok, a researcher with the Dutch archive, now known as NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies. “The best diarists are the ones with courage.”

Here are edited excerpts from several diaries that track the course of the war, beginning with the Nazi attack. Many people began their diaries that day, long before the radio address, as they worked to chronicle their lives in the most personal of terms. Their words, filled with the anxiety born of illness, isolation and uncertainty, register with particular power today in another unsettled time.



***Elisabeth Jacoba van Lohuizen-van Wielink** writes of the Nazi attack that began in the early morning of May 10, 1940, as German Luftwaffe paratroopers jumped from planes over selected targets across the country.*

Four days later, Rotterdam's center was bombed to the ground, killing 800 people. The Dutch royal family fled for England. The Dutch Army capitulated on May 15.

Van Lohuizen-van Wielink, 49, began her diary immediately and ultimately wrote 941 pages. She was the wife of a pharmacist and optician, who owned a grocery store in Epe, near Apeldoorn.

May 10, 1940

Last night the roar of aircraft kept waking us up. First at around two o'clock, later at around four. The second time, I got up to take a look, but couldn't see anything. I thought they might be German or English planes, heading for their enemies. I tried to sleep again. Though the noise never stopped, I was suddenly woken up by shouting.

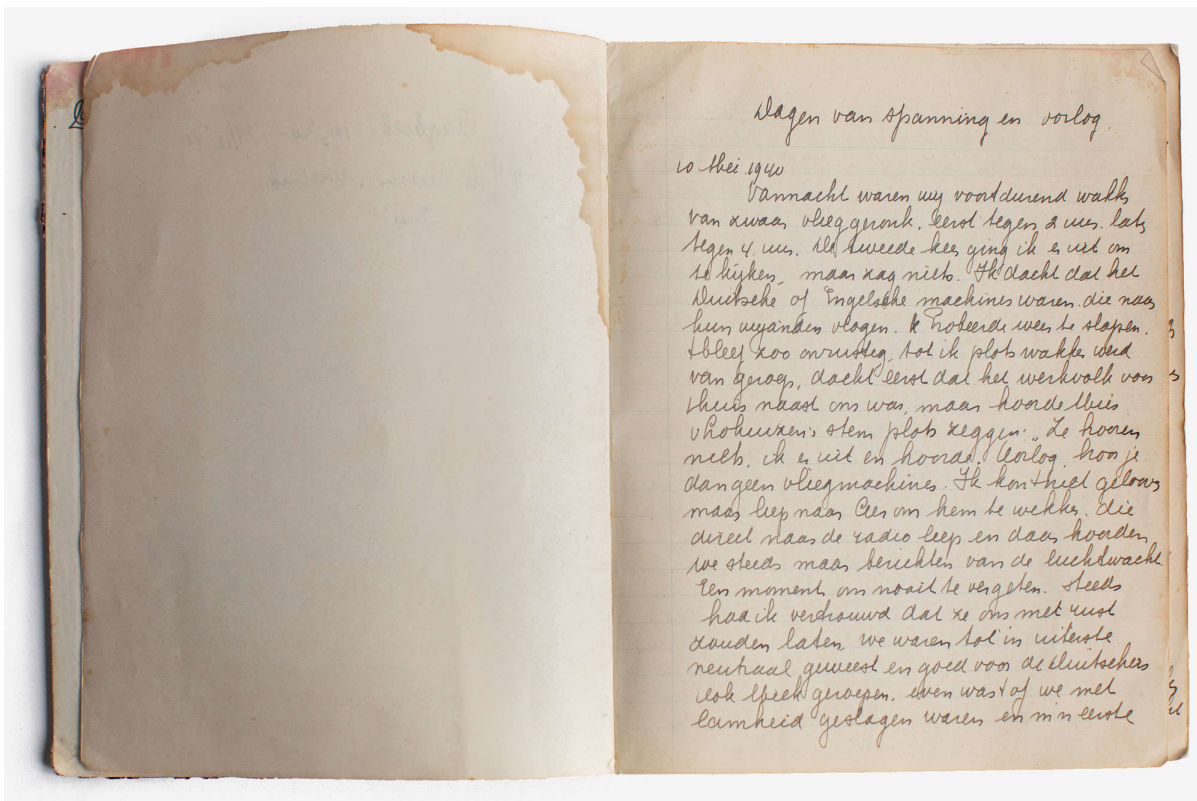


A woman on her roof in The Hague captured this image of German paratroopers filling the sky on the first day of the invasion.

At first, I thought it was the people working at the house next door, but then I heard Mies van Lohuizen suddenly say, 'They can't hear anything, I got up and heard, War! Can't you hear those airplanes?' I found it hard to believe, but woke up Cees, who immediately turned on the radio, and then

we heard several messages from the air force. A moment I'll never forget. I'd always assumed they would leave us alone. We had been neutral until the end, and good to the Germans. We heard shouting, too. For a minute, we felt like we were paralyzed, and my first thought was, poor soldiers, there will be bloodshed.

After we got dressed, we quickly packed what needed to go or be destroyed. Such as the alcohol, which definitely had to be taken. Most of it was sent a few weeks ago. The workmen, who were at home, were also asked to come. They were equally upset. War. We couldn't believe it. Everything in nature was so beautiful, and that day in particular was sunny and bright.



The May 10, 1940, entry in the diary of Elisabeth Jacoba van Lohuizen-van Wielink, in which she gives her account of the German invasion.

May 14, 1940

At 7 o'clock, suddenly an extra message on the radio, a moment I'll never forget. The commander in chief had decided to cease all hostilities.

Rotterdam was as good as destroyed by the bombardments; if they didn't cease fighting, The Hague, Amsterdam, and Utrecht would meet the same fate. I was so overwhelmed, I wept.

We weren't free anymore, and this, if we understood correctly, as a result of betrayal by our own people. We couldn't believe it, yet it was true. Everyone was glad no more people would be killed, but still. To become part of Germany, how awful! What will the future bring? Poverty for our country. A heavy ordeal for everyone and an uncertain future.

Diary of a Red Cross nurse — Catharina Damen-Ogier's diary gives vivid testimony of the impressions she made on people in her work as a Red Cross nurse in Maastricht. Page after page is filled with notes of appreciation, and sometimes pictures, from her medical colleagues and the injured soldiers — English, French and German — that she treated.

Tap to see more pages



The writer, a woman from The Hague whose name was not disclosed by the archive because of privacy concerns, is among those Dutch who sympathized with the German effort. A Dutch counterpart to the German Nazi party, the Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging, or N.S.B., had already been active in the country for several years prior to the Nazi invasion. Among the diarist's concerns, her irritation at the royal family's flight.

May 15, 1940

The [Dutch] air defense people ordered us to build barricades in the street in front of our house. Everyone had to help loosen tiles, stack them and take out all kinds of junk. I even saw parts of bed frames in the street. It was just ridiculous, absolutely laughable; it looked as if it'd been done by children. Later, we heard that citizens weren't even *allowed* to do this. Anyway, what were these barricades to the Germans? They would easily push everything aside with their powerful vehicles. Now *they* are proper soldiers; not like our boys, who couldn't control their nerves and just kept shooting at random.

The way the Germans acted was so proper, so magnificent, so disciplined; they command nothing but respect. The locals could learn a lot from the Germans. Just look at them marching by, on foot or on horseback or with their guns, looking so beautiful, so healthy, and with such cheerful faces; they're big and sturdy and very neat, making you think, inadvertently, some army the Dutch have! The people here are so rude and impolite, while the Germans are so proper and polite! It's easy to see the difference. This is the Netherlands, how dare they fight such a powerful, strong people? No wonder they had to give up fighting after four days, the difference was too great.



Weeks after the invasion, members of the German Ordnungspolizei force parade through the streets of The Hague on July 20, 1940.

And what about our officers — well, not all of them, of course — stirrers and rabble-rousers. I've always been one for the military and considered them our protectors, but I've had more than enough of them. I have no respect for them anymore. They have really frightened me. When I think of everything that's happened, I feel so embittered. I would love to let them have it. I'm livid, my heart is on fire. But Nat. Socialism says we're not to repay evil with evil! How is this possible if you harbor feelings of revenge for all the humiliation we've had to endure? It's nearly impossible, yet we must.

We need to rebuild, that's what's required of us. The fact that there are still people who support the Queen is incomprehensible to us; a queen who has fled her country because she feared for her life, who has abandoned her people in need; who has let her soldiers bleed to death and sought refuge herself! Surely, a mother doesn't abandon her child? The Germans wouldn't have harmed her; they are much too honorable for that.





In February 1941 the Nazis rounded up Jews in Amsterdam and sent them to concentration camps, as captured in these images taken by a German soldier. Many Dutch people who were not Jewish were outraged and responded by going on strike in several cities.

Diary of a 10-year-old girl — Leni Bijlsma collected poems in an album that was filled with contributions from friends and family. Its success as a diversion can be measured in the fact that the occupation is referred to only once in its pages. Distribution vouchers decorate an entry from May 1944.

Tap to see more pages



Jan Christiaan Marius Kruisinga's diary features accounts of events in 1941, when the occupiers first began rounding up and deporting Jews. Members of the Dutch Communist party, which was illegal at the time, called for a protest strike in response. On Feb. 25, trams in Amsterdam stopped working. Dockworkers walked off the job. Many shops closed in solidarity. Kruisinga, a notary and poet from Den Helder, wrote 3,600 pages in his multivolume diary.

Feb. 27, 1941

On Tuesday and Wednesday, there was a general strike in Amsterdam. There was nothing about it in the papers, but we heard the first rumors from travelers on Wednesday morning, and they were confirmed in the letters from the capital that we received today.



18 Febr. 1941
**JOODSCHE BLOEDGEVERS ALLEEN
 VOOR JODEN.**
 De commissaris-generaal voor bestuur en justitie, dr Wimmer, heeft den secretaris-generaal van het departement van Sociale Zaken verzocht te bepalen, dat joodsche bloedgevers en bloedgevers uit de bloedgeverslijsten worden verwijderd. Joden kunnen nog slechts als bloedgevers voor hun joodsche rasgenooten optreden. De verwijdering van joodsche bloedgevers uit de lijsten moet voor 1 Maart zijn geschied. (A. N. P.)

- SEPTEMBER
- AUGUST
- APRIL
- OCTOBER
- JANUARY
- DECEMBER
- FEBRUARY
- NOVEMBER
- JUNE
- JULY
- MARCH

- Vanavond in het Zuiden het hevigste geknal dat ik in dezen oorlog ooit gehoord heb - althans gedurende twee uren aan één stuk. Er is geen vliegtuig overgekomen; richting en afstand duiden echter op het Roergebied, waarbij ik speciaal denk aan Gelsenkirchen, de stad van sintels en spoelwater. Als er maar geen menschen bij dergelyke aanvallen gepijnigd werden, zou het een goed ding zijn dat er aan steden als Gelsenkirchen en nog zoo vele andere verwante plaatsen kort en goed een eind werd gemaakt. Maar het zou me wel spijten voor Overste die zoo goed caricaturen kan teekenen, en een paar jaar geleden aan alle debatten op het vliegveld een eind maakte (het ging over handicap - ballast bij een ballonwedstrijd) door te beweren dat in het Derde Rijk iedere passagier precies 70 kg woog. Schluss! Dit soort menschen is ons welkom. Als overste in de queue stond, zou ik hem bij vele Nederlanders laten voorgaan, en bij een Engelschen luchtaanval zou ik hem ongaarne zien omkomen.

Overste
X

APRIL

- 27 Februari 1941. In Amsterdam heeft Dinsdag en Woensdag een vrijwel algeheele werkstaking geheerscht. In de couranten heeft er niets over gestaan, maar de eerste geruchten van reizigers hoorden wij Woensdagmorgen al, en deze werden grootendeels door vandaag ontvangen brieven uit de hoofdstad bevestigd. De oorzaak van de staking schijnt te hebben gelegen in het feit dat "Groene Politie" te zamen met..... de W.A. of de "Nederlandsche SS" in de Jodenbuurt alle mannelyke Joden van 20 tot 35 jaar uit hun huizen gehaald heeft, en vervolgens op het Waterlooplein bijeengedreven, in vrachtauto's geladen en in de richting Schoorl of Wieringermeer weggevoerd. Reeds eerder schijnt wrijving te zijn ontstaan door het requireeren van arbeiders voor Duitschland op een van de Amsterdamsche scheepswerven, van waaruit toen alle werven en dokken werden opgebeld met de aansporing om onmiddellyk het werk neer te leggen. Die zaak schijnt door de Duitsche autoriteiten nog te zijn bijgelegd, maar de interneering van de Joodsche bevolking werd door de "arische" stadgenooten niet genomen; spoedig rukten de Jordaan en Kattenburg uit en improviseerden een soort oranjevest op den Dam - wat op het oogenblik niet mag. In de stad werden de arbeiders met borden ("De Joden vrij, dan werken wij) aangespoord om Dinsdag niet aan het werk te gaan. En dit

Geruch -
ten be -
vestigd

Bevolk-
ing
neemt
het op
voor de
Joden

L niet alle, bleek later, in den zomer werd gesproken van 600 à 700 man, in het najaar van ongeveer 1000, waarvan toen ruim de helft al dood zou zijn.

MARCH

The diary of Jan Kruisinga, opened to pages that reference the events of February 1941.

The cause of the strike seems to have been the fact that the ‘Green Police’¹ and the WA² or ‘Dutch SS’ took all male Jews aged between 20 and 35 from their homes in the Jewish area, herded them together on Waterlooplein,³ loaded them onto trucks and took them in the direction of Schoorl or Wieringermeer. There had been tension before, apparently, as a result of the requisition of workers for Germany at one of the Amsterdam shipyards, after which all shipyards and dockyards were telephoned and urged to immediately down tools. This issue seems to have been settled by the German authorities, but the imprisonment of the Jewish population was not accepted by their ‘Aryan’ fellow-townsmen; the Jordaan and Kattenburg areas turned out soon, improvising a kind of *oranjefeest*⁴ on Dam⁵ — which is forbidden at the moment. Signs (‘*de Joden vrij, dan werken wij*’ — ‘free the Jews, then we’ll work’) were used in the city to urge workers not to go to work on Tuesday.

Which is what happened: There were no trams or buses, and most public services — the gas and water company in particular — were largely or entirely suspended. It was eerily quiet in the city at night, only pistol shots could be heard from time to time. I don’t know yet whether there were any casualties and, if so, how many.

Some 300,000 workers joined the strike in Amsterdam, where there was marching in the streets. The next day, workers in Haarlem, Hilversum, Utrecht, and other cities joined in. Clashes with retaliating German forces in various places left nine dead and 24 wounded.

1 — The German Ordnungspolizei, who wore green uniforms 2 — Weerbaarheidsafdeling, the military wing of the N.S.B. 3 — Square in the East of Amsterdam 4 — Orange celebration, i.e. a national celebration 5 — Square in the center of Amsterdam



Mirjam Bolle of Amsterdam wrote at a time when conditions were particularly gruesome for Dutch Jews. Because the sick were among the first to be carted off in transports to concentration camps, people who were ill often piled into the homes of able-bodied relatives, creating cramped households. Bolle discusses the many people her family is attempting to house in this excerpt from her diary of letters to her fiancé that she wrote but never mailed. They were published in English in a book, “Letters Never Sent” by Yad Vashem in 2014.

Feb. 23, 1943: Half-Past Midnight

This is no life, but hell on earth. My hands are trembling so much I can barely write. This is all getting too much. This is more than anyone can bear. Another transport is leaving this evening. I had planned not to go to bed too late. Aunt Dina is staying with us at the moment. I already wrote to you that she stays at our house during the day because she has been left at home on grounds of illness and now she fears being taken away, which is what happens in all of these cases. At home on Saturday morning, she got such a bad crick in her back that she couldn't move, not even in bed. It was awful, because it meant she wouldn't be able to come and stay with us on Monday, as Jews aren't allowed in taxis.



Jewish citizens of Amsterdam, including children with their toys, prepare to be deported on May 25, 1943.

We decided to wait and see what Sunday would bring, but her condition didn't improve. She was then brought to our house by private patient transport, that's to say on a stretcher in an ambulance. It was terrible to see her stretched in like that, but we still laughed, because fortunately there's nothing wrong with her apart from her bad back.

Verklaring - Bescheinigung	
Desgewenscht bij autoriteiten te toonen	Zur Vorlage bei allen Behörden
De hiernevens gefotografeerde	Der Die nebenstehend abgebildete
Levie, Mirjam Sophie	
geboren	10-3-1917 te Amsterdam
wonend	Amsterdam
wohhaft zu	
is bij den ist beim	Joodschen Raad voor Amsterdam als Vorstands - Sekretärin
Amsterdam,	3 Nov. 1941
Nummer:	148



Handteekening:
Unterschrift: *M. Bolle*

Secretaresse - Bestuur Werkzaam
- Sekretärin beschäftigt

JOODSCHE RAAD VOOR AMSTERDAM

A. Asscher } Voorzitters
Prof. Dr. D. Cohen }

An identity card issued to Mirjam Bolle under her maiden name, Mirjam Levie, in November 1941.

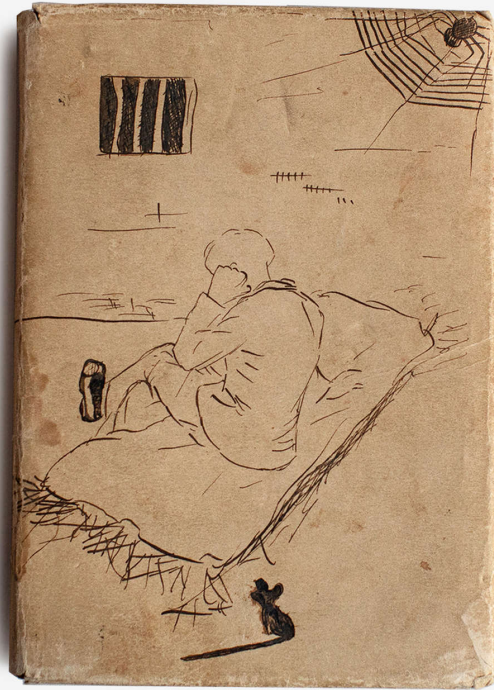
When the ambulance pulled up at their doorstep, neighborhood women rushed out to ask what was happening. Lea said: “My aunt has become unwell, and because she can’t stay with us we have to have her picked up in this way. And would you please excuse me now, for Mother isn’t at home either.” This is the kind of act you have to put on because it would be unwise to reveal too much. Well-intentioned gossip could fall on the wrong ears. Aunt Dina is staying with us now and is already doing much better. She sleeps in Grandmother’s bed in the passage room. Since Friday, Mr. Vromen has also been living with us. He is sleeping in the back room, our former living room.



Willem Bogaard, (left) the son of a farmer, sits with some of the dozens of Jewish people that his family was hiding on their property in Nieuw-Vennep. Many of the people were captured in a raid in 1943 and sent to their deaths. Mr. Bogaard's father, Johannes Bogaard, was also taken away with another of his sons. Neither survived the war.

An arrest — Another diary with many illustrations, this one, written by Petronella Jacoba Margaretha Venema-van Nijnatten, recounts events including her arrest, along with her mother, by the Germans during a house search.

Tap to see more pages



Cornelis Komen, a 48-year old salesman for an English asbestos company, recognized the disparity between how his family and Jewish people were treated during a 1943 train trip to an orchard. The outing was disrupted by a raid in Amsterdam that rounded up more than 2,400 Jews for deportation.

Ja ja loon. Een juwel heeft oylt in ons op. Wy gaan deze
judeit van ellende vonden dag verlaten. De joden kom om 7. 45
aan. Hy is nog val ook, medants dat hy met heeft gestopt aan
Muiderspoort. Heulgh wy syn en rukten op weg naar Tiel.

Ik en de joden met een wat in in Amsterdam woort afgevoert.
De laatste joden wonden op jehaelt. Op een hoop gedreven en
weg gevoerd als see. Het hies e. hof naar de vleende. Eerst naar
Vucht en daarna door op transport naar Polen - Och, wat moete
de menschen toch wel mee maken. Gevoelden van vrouw en
kint. Toat het jee aangenaem volk syn. Maar het syn toch
menschen. Hoe kan dat de Goede God jedaogen. Het antwoord
op dese vraag gaf de Domine voor geringe weeten teing op
de jndag minge. Hy bray den heeft ook jedaogen dat Judas
hem heeft verraden dat Petrus hem heeft verloekend te dat
een volk hem kruingde. Het ay zoo

Maar wy syn op weg naar Tiel. Oievolle trein en in Wreult
korten nog een stampre by. Maar de stemming ozer want
alles trecken vandaag op uit, Kessen etc of helen in jelde makte
omstappen naar Tiel. Nog drukken de wagens jruelen uit. Maar
we konten er. V. Uden staats om al op te waekten. Wat is het toch vrede
in gult en allen proovene stadje. De wlyt tafel waekt ons. Als
steeds is dit een heulghre verassing voor ons. Rooholceer met
berkent. Onze Niek was hier nog noot geweest, maar hy is
gans de beste vriende met Hans. Dal syn 2 moore prenten
boeken by elkaar. Daar kunnen we nog lol van beleven.
e. jeynde jongens hoer. Dan drinken we hofte te jaan we op
dag naar de kessen boomgaard. Wy moete alle wendinge maken
van 7 uur. Heulgh is dit in de Betuwe. Om ons heen met andere
den ruochende korn velden, afgevoert dng praechtje boom
gaarden. Men appela, daar jeeh en soms ook jruening of kerdie
foormen. Het en nog moores dan het andere. Dan korten we
by boer Schelling. V. Uden laat meten en kest van 15 pond kessen
aanrukken. Wy oleen ons nen te beginnen te peuzelen. Binnen
een half uur is de kest leeg en we kunnen geen kess meer jeeh. Dat is
het. allen waar je te veit van kryjt, het je gans genoeg van. Wy
gaan heidlo ope. V. Uden moet het tegen my afleggen. Met ont
het van Hans. De kornen syn kampsolen. Dan jaan we bokse.
Daarna trachten de jongens v. Uden op de jond te kryje. Jeyn
schygen van kess. Hy gweet alsoen aandrager. Wy maken
ons heulgh moe. Wat is het leve mooi

En in Amsterdam worden de joden op een hoop gedreven als
see. Hun bundeltje op de end. De dikh by hien. Dagen ra te voren
hetten je hem op alleger al slaan jemaekt. Maar hoe wat moet
dijt afgeheid zwage geweest syn jfstedid van hem jng verhoend
kess kame. Van hant vanden te kess. In wy eke kess de
eene maek na de andere.

Ik mag nu op de hoeren, maar ik loch op meuten dat u niet ook
 uit Billyhorn de looze prijs zit. Maar dat begrijpt de eenvoudige
 wachmen loch niet. Als een boer een koe moet leveren (Gevorderd)
 dan ontvangt hij van de regering wege hoer slag / 250.

Wil hij een koe by hoeren om zijn veestapel by peil te houden
 dan betaalt hij 4 maanden / 200. - v.m. Aldus byna
 1000. v.m. Wa betaalt dat?

Om buur wordt u by ons gebeld. Daar staat von de deus de
 vriend van Treus de k. koch die n.b. just Scheidrecht komt en
 my de beloofde 5 sloffwaardberen brengt. Het is mefen tal
 by mo thuis. Kom binnen, doe je jas uit, jeef hier een kop. Vroon
 jeet thee. Moet Ven slaap bin. We weten niet wat we doen
 mocht. Wat een pracht deul. ja zegt koch als ik wat beloof
 dan houdt ik mijn woord. Dit dankbaarheid schenken wy
 hem een stuk Scheide. Dat heeft hij voor zijn of ouwen loch
 wel verkeerd. En de normale prijs moettes we betalen / 0.55
 per pond. Wat een bof he. Hy klyft met zijn vrouw slecht loch
 had, moet nog veldtop vrede.

En wy jaag aan de slag. Ik magh je schom, Co waelt de
 potter schom. Kuch helpt vol mede, maar ik jelaaf dat hy
 te meer op eet. Maar ons wuel wordt beloond. Om 20 uen
 we sijn bloed-op, maar 16 potter Jany slaap von ons in
 hem / schone kleuen. Wat zullen ze heelyt smaken.
 Wat een eyndom. Wat kan de wereld u loch heel anders
 met zien in een koch by d.

Onze dachtes sijn al weg op weg naar Tiel. Zy loqers by

Lo Jumi En wy jaag naar v. Uden. Om 5 uen ben ch al op. De
 Jitendag was en dag van regen & wind & de zondag billoofel
 een shalende Jomendag te worden. Voor ons, maar voor velen
 jul dze dag en wejen die nog lang in de geschiedenis behend
 jul sijn. Wat is te gebeurd?

Ik herneut om half 7 dat er geen tram komt. Dat klopt niet.
 wat kan de oorzak sijn? Ik je groep je menschen struk met
 elkaar in gespruk. Naar buiten is mijn gedaachte. In jul wetten
 wat dat betekend. Grooth God een meelure egoon. Over de of jodoten
 Joud ook. Je kan in glad met in. Dus hoe kan je naar Centraal
 of Muiderpoort? Daar jaat mye moore dag. Kom met de moed
 op geven. Ik je de lange geueken al van mijn vrouwe en jongen.
 In den we naar het Amstel stat om jaag, ja je je d je je je
 by won delen in dze heelye de Jomendag door in Kruislaan
 van Kruislaan naar Gondel Huis. Wy ontmoete je de
 Herveling. Ag je kinnen te plakte herveend het mo de dal is
 hetal wela. Ja u wel een trein ry den?

June 20, 1943

Many people on the train don't even know what's going on in Amsterdam. The last Jews are being rounded up. Herded together and taken away like cattle. From hearth and home to foreign parts. First, they're taken to Vught, then they're transported to Poland — oh, the misery these people must be going through. Separated from their wives and children. They may not be a pleasant people, but they're still human beings. How can the Good God allow this?



On June 20, 1943, as Cornelis Komen was making an expedition to a cherry orchard, a young Jewish boy and an older man, perhaps his father, awaited transport to Westerbork, the transit camp from which tens of thousands of Jews were sent to their deaths.

But we're on our way to Tiel. The train is packed, and in Utrecht another bunch piles in. But people are in a good mood, because everyone's getting out today, to eat or buy cherries. In Geldermalsen we change trains to Tiel. Even more crowded. The carriages are bursting at the seams. But we're getting there, and Van Dien is waiting for us. How peaceful it is, this small provincial town. When we arrive, there's breakfast on the table. As always, this is such a lovely surprise to us. Smoke-dried beef and rusks.

Afterward, we have some coffee, and then we're off to the cherry orchard. We need to walk three quarters of an hour. It's beautiful in the Betuwe.⁶ We're surrounded by nothing but rustling wheat fields, interspersed with beautiful orchards. Apples here, pears over there, and sometimes plum or cherry trees. One even more beautiful than the other. Then we reach Farmer Kerdijk. Van Dien immediately orders a box of 7.5 kilos of cherries.

We sit ourselves down and start to eat. The box is empty in less than half an hour, but then we're fed up with cherries. That's the problem; if you have too much of something, it soon starts to pall. We run a race. Van Dien loses to me. Wim beats Bert. The Willinks are the champions. Then we do some boxing. And then the boys try to wrestle Van Dien down to the ground. Not a chance. He breaks into a sweat. It's lovely getting tired this way. How wonderful life is.

While in Amsterdam, the Jews are herded together like cattle. Carrying their bundles on their backs. Their blankets. They packed their things days in advance. Still, how hard their departure must have been. Parting from their familiar living rooms, their friends and acquaintances. While we are eating cherries, one basket after another. Lazing around. How lovely this place is.

6 — A fruit-growing region in the east of the Netherlands

The Battle of Oosterbeek — Some of the diaries have elaborate illustrations, such as this album from a young girl, Marijke E. van Dongen-Seelen, that recounts the battle in 1944 around her home in Oosterbeek, a Dutch village. Marijke, who now lives in Maastricht, recopied the diary in 1947, it was then filled with drawings by her father.

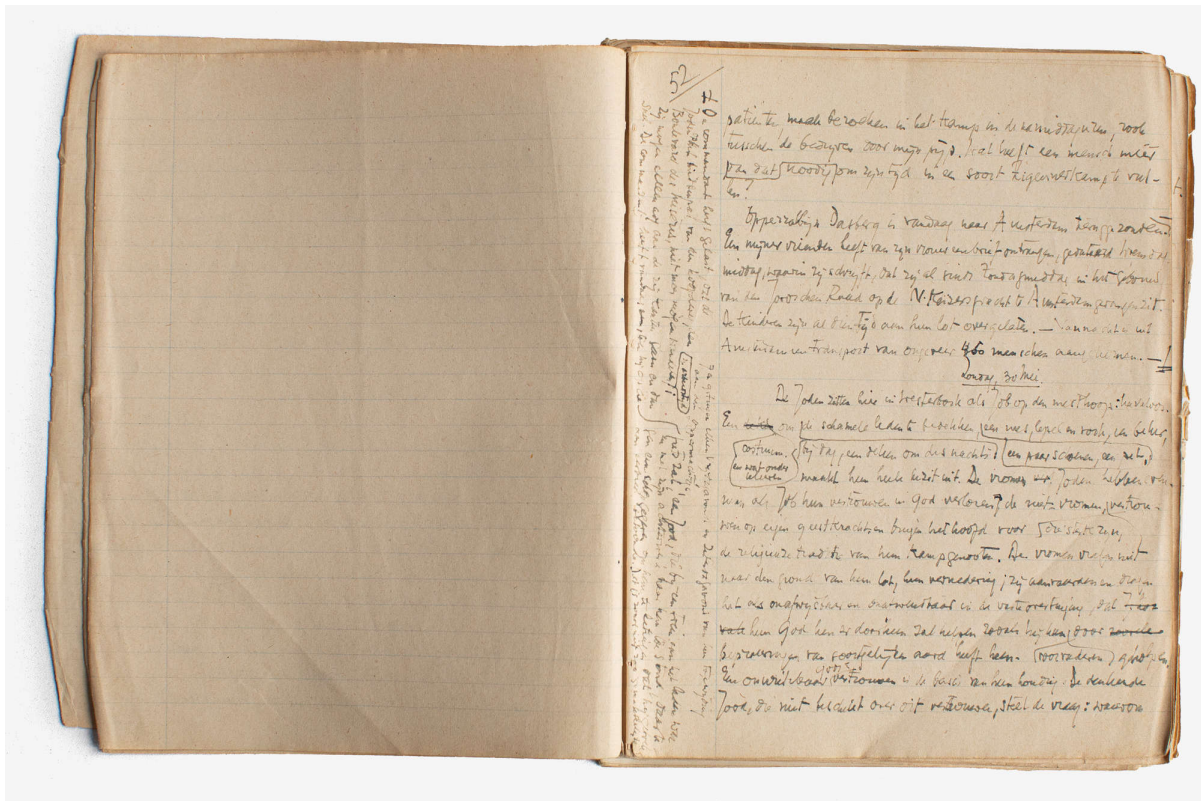
Tap to see more pages



***Philip Mechanicus**, a journalist in his 50s, was arrested in September 1942 for not wearing a Star of David on a tram, and sent to Westerbork, a transit camp in the northeast Netherlands where many Jews were brought. Most were then sent on to Nazi concentration and extermination camps farther east in Poland, Germany and Austria. The diary of Mechanicus, published in English in 1968, documented camp life with precision. He often spoke of the transports, which left every Tuesday, carrying 1,000 to 3,000 people, to even harsher fates.*

Saturday, May 29, 1943

It feels as though I'm an official reporter reporting on a shipwreck. We're in a cyclone together, aware that the holed ship is sinking slowly and trying to reach a harbor, but this harbor seems far away. I'm slowly beginning to realize that I haven't been brought here by my *persecutors*; I'm on this journey *voluntarily* to do my work. I'm busy all day long, not bored at all, sometimes I almost don't even have enough time. Duty calls and labor is noble. I spend much of the day writing; sometimes, I start as early as 5:30 in the morning, sometimes I'm still at it after bedtime, summarizing my impressions or experiences of the day.

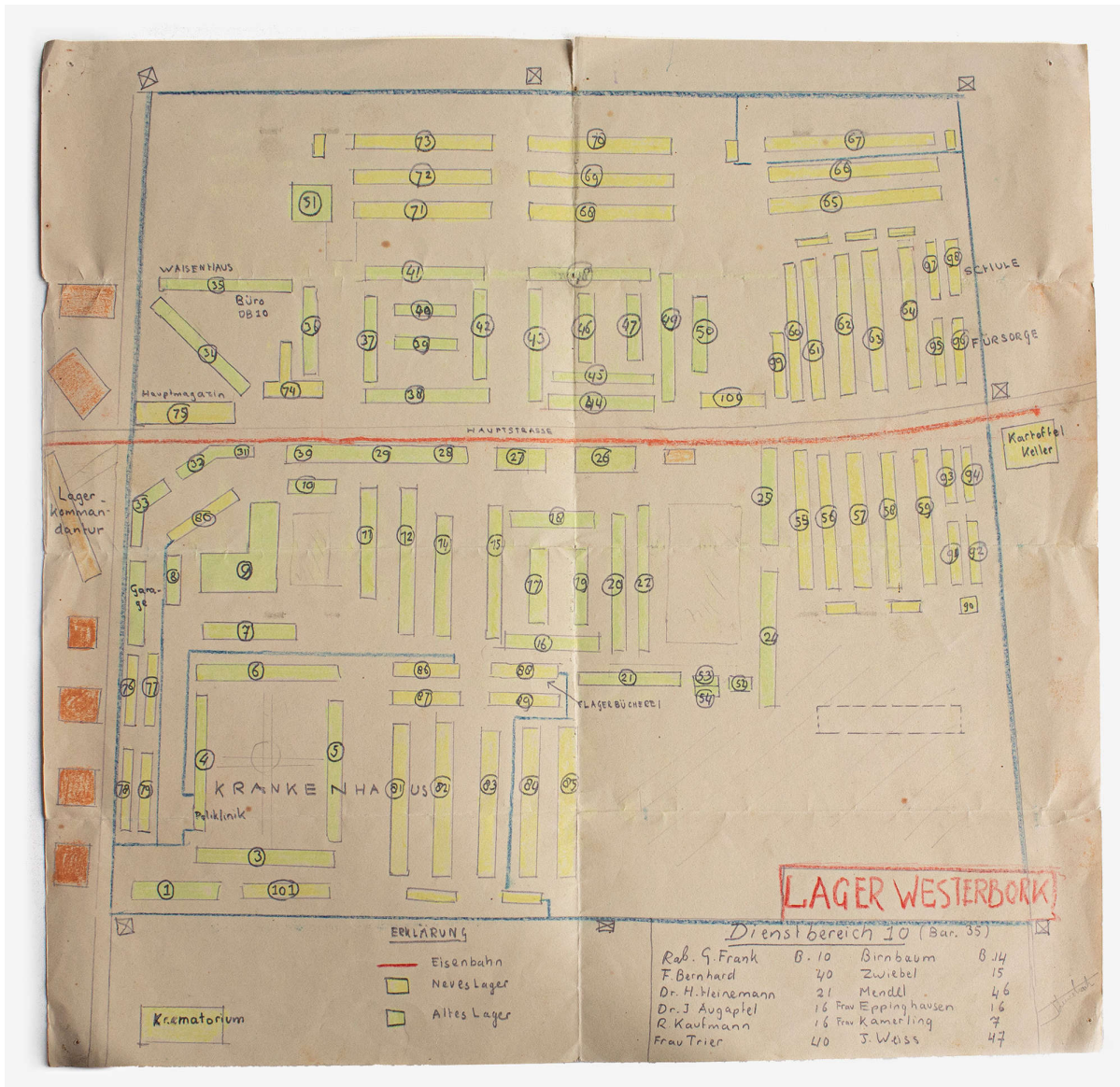


A page from the diary of Philip Mechanicus describing events at Westerbork on May 29, 1943.

Thursday, June 1, 1943

The transports continue to evoke disgust. People are actually taken in animal wagons intended for transporting horses. And the deported no longer lie on straw but among their bags of food and small pieces of luggage on the bare floor — including the ill, who were given a mattress only last week. They're gathered at the exits of their barracks and taken by OD men [OD stands for Ordendienst, the camp's police force required to keep order] in rows of three to the train on the Boulevard des Misères, in the middle of the camp.

The train: a long, mangy snake of filthy old wagons splitting the camp in two. The Boulevard: a deserted area guarded by OD men to keep redundant onlookers at bay. The exiles carry a bread bag strapped to the shoulder and hanging on their hips, as well as a rolled-up blanket hanging from the other shoulder by a rope and swinging on their backs. Dirty emigrants who own no more than what they're wearing and what is hanging from them. Men: quiet, faces drawn; women: often sobbing. The elderly: stumbling down the bad road, sometimes through mud puddles, buckling under their heavy load. The ill on stretchers, hauled by OD men.



A map of Westerbork as drawn by Mirjam Bolle during her internment there.

Tuesday, Jan. 25, 1944

A transport of a thousand people left for Auschwitz in a howling storm and pouring rain. In animal wagons, yet again. The majority was from the S barracks: 590 people. The rest, young men of the Aliyah, old men from the hospital and 31 young, nameless children from the orphanage whose parents are either absent or have already been sent to Poland. Amongst them was a 10-year-old boy with a temperature of 39.9°C [103.82°F]: one-tenth of a degree short to be one of the lucky ones who are categorized (by the Germans) as *Untransportfähig* [untransportable]. The removal of punished or unproductive elements who were just a burden on the camp budget.

People still don't know what happens to the deported Jews in Poland. They curse the National Socialists and try to find terms to express their feelings of disdain, disgust, horror, and hate, but no one finds the right words.



A crowd gathers in Oud-Beijerland, a town in the western Netherlands, to say goodbye to the local butcher and his family, Jews who were told to board the tram and were sent to Rotterdam. They were ultimately transported to Auschwitz and killed less than two months later.

'When, oh when will the war be over? When will this misery of the weekly transports come to an end?' the women lament. 'The war is going well! But there's a transport every week,' the men say, mocking them, trusting the war will soon end in victory for the Allies. Winter is progressing, and people fear that if there's no decisive battle this winter, the war will drag

on all summer, and there won't be a single Jew left on Dutch soil. Hope alternates with fear: Where are we heading? What is our fate? What is our future?

Monopoly money — Not all the Dutch diaries were created in Europe. Dick van Engelenburg, making use of the available paper, recorded his experiences in an internment camp in the Dutch East Indies on the back of Monopoly money.

Tap to see more pages



***Petronella Catharina Hauser**, a 27-year old teacher from Rotterdam, described in her diary how famine affected daily life. During the last winter of the war, the Hunger Winter, as it was known, the Germans blockaded much of the Netherlands, cutting off food and fuel supplies in response to a Dutch rail strike intended to help the Allies.*

Wednesday, Feb. 7, 1945

Even for us, the situation is getting precarious! There are hardly any potatoes anymore, and even the pulses are nearly finished. ... Ma is getting thinner and paler by the day. The slices of bread we've been putting off eating are in the bread bin. ... There's half a loaf for today ... Thursday ... And Friday. ...

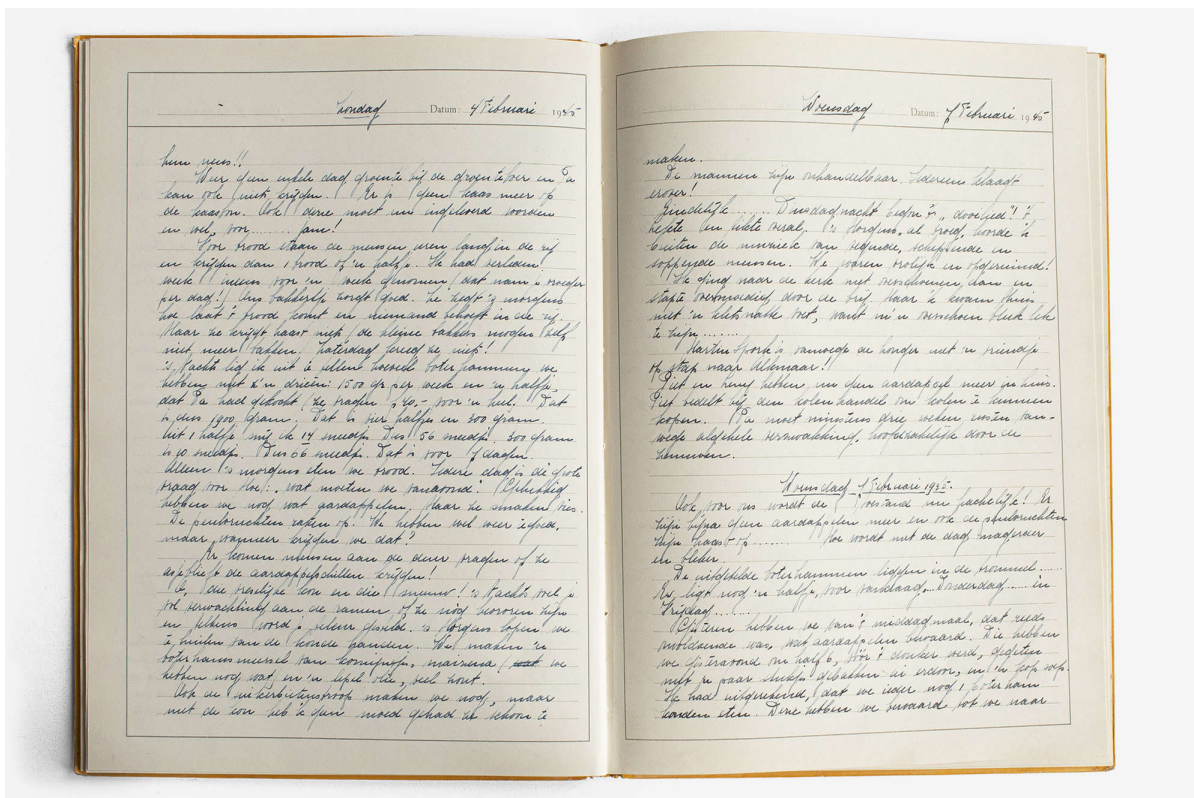


Workers cleaned beets at a soup kitchen in Rotterdam during the Hunger Winter of 1945, when German blockades were cutting off food supplies to the Netherlands.

Yesterday, we kept some potatoes aside from the already insufficient afternoon meal. We ate them with a few bits of fried onion mixed in and a cup of soup at five-thirty in the evening, before it got dark. I calculated that each of us could have one more slice of bread. Which we kept until bedtime

and had with a cup of 'tea', otherwise it would be too long until the next morning! (As if one such a doughy stale slice could keep you going!) We didn't have anything to top them with, as we had only some cumin cheese left (topping for tomorrow morning). We dunked them in our 'tea' and liked it. ... !!!!

I have a sore foot: a large blister! Dad can't get hold of anything anymore; no vegetables, no onions, the potato man isn't around. ...



February 1945 pages from the diary of Petronella Catharina Hauser.

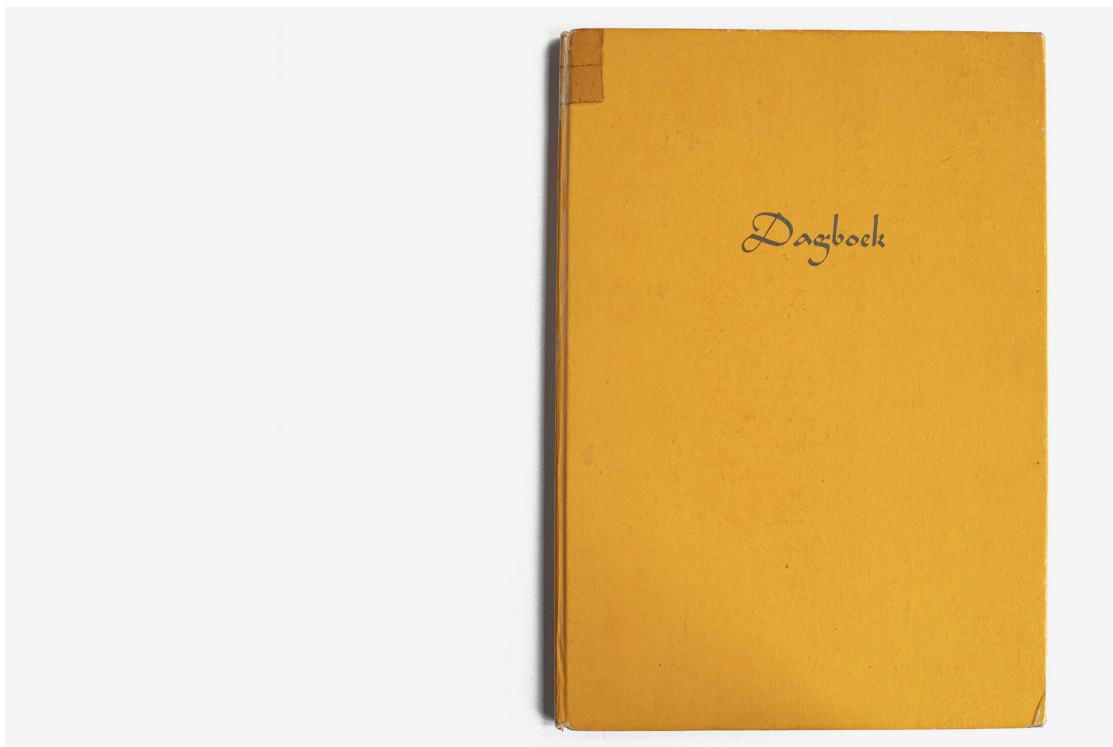
There's no bread for sale, even if you'd want to pay a fortune for it. People want to barter things! But what do we have to barter? We don't have any tobacco, our supply of coffee and tea has been bartered already, and the number of tablecloths, bedsheets, and pieces of underwear we have has been reduced too.

Thursday, Feb. 8, 1945

I couldn't sleep last night because I was so hungry! I got out of bed and took one of my three slices of bread for the next day. There was also a pan with boiled brown peas for the next day. I took some of those, too. I felt like a thief in my own home ... ! Feel sick today.

Relief — The diary of Petronella Catharina Hauser continued to the end of the war in the Netherlands and included scenes of food drops by the Allies as well as the arrival of American and Canadian troops in a liberated Rotterdam in May 1945.

Tap to see more pages



ADVERTISEMENT



Anton Frans Koenraads, a 39-year-old teacher in Delft, the hometown of Johannes Vermeer, wrote about how the war in the Netherlands ended on May 5, 1945. Canadian and German commanders reached an agreement that day on the capitulation of German forces. But Koenraads is among those who are slow to trust that the war is really over.

May 6th, 1945

The mayor gestures for calm. He is about to address the citizens. I notice that he's shouting, but the only words of the entire proclamation that I can hear are 'fellow-townsmen and women' and, much later, 'we're free.' Those who are standing near him can hear more, while we just join in the repeated, spontaneous bursts of cheering. Finally, we all sing the old *Wilhelmus*,⁷ moving us all, and when the line 'drive out the tyranny' resounds, it seems as if a long pent-up feeling of hatred erupts in people.



By April 1945, the Germans were pulling back from sections of the Netherlands as the Allies advanced. This confetti, dropped by British military planes, was pasted into an anonymous diary.

It's real now, though, and while I'm writing this, I try to realize what it means. But it's so hard to put down in words. Five years of having lived under the yoke of a ruthless enemy aren't erased in just a few minutes. But what I *can* grasp, is that:

Soon, there will be food

There will be gas, electricity, and water

There will be fuel

Trains and trams will run again

Our men will return from G, where they have been living as forced laborers for years

Our prisoners of war and students will also return

I can walk down the street at any time, day or night

The blackout paper can be removed everywhere

I don't need to be frightened when a car is driving down the street

I thought I could end this diary with a sentence like: The first Canadians, still smudged with the smoke of battle, are turning the corner of our street. But things have turned out differently. We're still cheerfully awaiting their arrival.

I expected the end would bring relief, like taking off a lead suit. Things turned out differently yet again. I find it difficult to get used to the idea that we really are free now. Every time I think of how many things that used to frighten me have now disappeared, my heart is touched with happiness.

Thus, this diary is coming to an end. In it, I've tried to convey what has been on my mind during these recent months of the war. It's by no means objective. Objectivity is a matter of time, of history, and of [one's] point of view.



Two young Jewish children, Rene and Lucy, who were hidden by a Dutch family, are reunited with their father, Herman Speyer, on May 7, 1945, after the liberation.

Later history books could — mind you, *could* — be objective. But this diary can't possibly be. It has been written as events were unfolding, sometimes without knowing the causes, even, of the facts that I have described, nor of their place in the bigger picture. Some of the facts may have been incorrectly motivated, but they really did happen. Sometimes I fear that I won't be believed, because later generations simply won't wish to accept what's described in these pages, yet I swear on everything that's dear to me that none of the events are untrue. Everything that's been written down was 'hot off the press,' I would say.

I've had the painful privilege of having experienced an 'all-out war.' That is behind us now. With all the strength that's in us, let's go for 'all-out peace.'

7 — The Dutch national anthem 8 — Concentration camps in the Netherlands 9 — From May 13, 1943, having a radio was illegal, to prevent people from listening to forbidden stations

Liberation in Zwolle — The diary of M.E. Versteeg captured the arrival of Allied forces in the city of Zwolle in mid-April 1945, several weeks before the capitulation of the German army in the Netherlands.

Tap to see more pages



Diaries, once thought to be too subjective to be historical sources, are now regarded as more reliable, experts say, though primarily for their ability to depict how people thought and felt.

Of the seven diarists excerpted, only **Ms. Bolle**, who is 103 and resides in Israel, is still alive. She was sent to a concentration camp during the war but was one of a handful of prisoners in Bergen-Belsen who were traded for the release of German POWs in Palestine during the war.

Mr. Mechanicus was also put on a train to Bergen-Belsen. From there he was transferred to Auschwitz, where he was shot on arrival, on Oct. 12, 1944.

Mr. Kruisinga survived the war and later lived in Vriezenveen, a town in the Netherlands where he died on Feb. 1, 1971, at the age of 75.

Ms. Van Lohuizen-van Wielink became active in the resistance, and is credited with saving the lives of 72 Jews; she, her husband and son were arrested and imprisoned for this work, but survived the war.

Archivists do not have a sense of what happened to the other diarists featured here, but they hope to keep their memories alive through the work of more than 130 transcribers like Josine Franken, a retired speech therapist.

She is now transcribing a diary, her fourth, that was written by Arnolda Johanna Geertruid Huizinga-Sannes, the wife of a vicar from Velp, a town near Arnhem and near the front lines during the final stages of the war. Ms. Huizinga-Sannes hoped her daughter might be able to read the diary after the war.

“She had twins, a daughter and a son,” Ms. Franken said of Ms. Huizinga-Sannes. But the son died shortly after the war and her daughter became mentally ill.

“So then when you read all the woman writes, knowing that her daughter will never read it,” she said, “and knowing that her two children are lost to her, it’s very moving. It gives you such a feeling of compassion.”

Translations by Susan Ridder, except for Mirjam Bolle, whose excerpt is courtesy of Yad Vashem.

Photographs by Ilvy Njiokiktjien for The New York Times; archival images via NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies.

Design by Shannon Lin and Rumsey Taylor. Art production by Andy Rodriguez, Dave Braun, Andy Chen and Laura Kaltman. Produced by Kevin Flynn, Alicia DeSantis and Jolie Ruben, with additional editing by Helen Verongos.