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The Dutch Underground in Barneveld From Occupation to Liberation

Captain R.T. Currelly

This is an account of the activities of the Dutch Underground in the area of Barneveld as given to Captain R.T. Currelly, 1st Canadian Field Historical Section, by the District Commander of Barneveld and another official of the same area in May 1945.

The Beginnings

In the autumn of 1940, when it was realized that the occupation of Holland was likely to last for sometime, numbers of patriotic Dutchmen began to offer individual and unorganized resistance. This mainly took the form of passive obstructionism. The Germans were behaving in the most correct manner possible. They took over complete control of civil affairs and as long as our people did what they were told, all was well. This correct behaviour on the part of the German soldiers continued until the disaster of Stalingrad, at which time there was a noticeable lessening of the control which the Officers were able to exert over their men.

Right from the beginning individuals had been doing what they could for escaped Allied Airmen. This was at first quite unorganized and all we could do was to hide them in our houses, feed them and possibly direct them on to the next house which it would be safe for them to visit. This gradually became better organized and we were able to pass them from house to house until they reached the Belgian frontier. This was the first step of their long journey home via Spain and Portugal. It was a highly dangerous business as the Germans knew about it and would arrest and execute anyone who was suspected of taking part in it, usually torturing them first to make them give away their accomplices.

Second Phase

By 1942 the Underground was getting much better organized. The innumerable small parties first formed themselves into three groups and these later merged into one vast organization which divided the entire country into districts, each run by a District Commander. A fairly efficient liaison was established with England. British Officers were dropped by parachute and were of great assistance in helping us to get organized and in keeping contact with the Netherlands Government in England. (So far as I know these agents had to make their way back by the arduous road to Spain.)

During the early period of the occupation the Germans had ordered all Jews to register their nationality and have the letter "J" marked on their identity card. Most of our hundred thousand Jews obeyed this order. Those who did not, had to disappear. Rationing was strict and it was very difficult to live without a ration card. It became our task to supply them with these and also with false identity cards. We became very clever at falsifying the latter and many Jewish printers, who had gone underground, were of great assistance in this. In the case of ration cards, as they had to be renewed every month, it was easier to get proper ones by clandestine methods than to make them ourselves. Most of the officials who were handling the rationing system were Dutchmen and in nearly every case "K P" (*knokploeg* or thieving parties) had inside help in their exciting but highly dangerous occupation. The stealing of ration cards reached astounding proportions and the Germans became very perturbed about it. They issued strict orders that

when cards were stolen from a rationing office no replacements were to be supplied. However, the officials in the central offices could be counted on to disobey this order. The ration entitlement was small, but no matter how many were stolen, and the figure eventually reached one hundred and thirty thousand per month, there always seemed to be enough food to fill them.

In July 1942 the Germans began to arrest the Jews and to assemble them in a ghetto in Amsterdam. They could obviously not arrest them all at once, and, when the Jews saw which way the wind was blowing, many more went underground. This, of course, further swelled our ranks and increased our ration and identity card problem. From Amsterdam the Jews were removed to a concentration camp at Westerborg in east Holland. From here they were removed in batches to Poland where most of them are believed to have been executed, though no figures are available. Others are known to have been placed in mines and to have "lived and worked as slaves under the Emperor Nero."

In 1943 the Germans ordered the registration of all young men between the ages of 18 and 25. These were to be "available" for work in Germany. The Germans were very magnanimous about this and it was possible to gain exemption for compassionate or other adequate reason. Most of the young men registered. However, many did

not like the idea of making munitions to be hurled against England and took the only other step which was to disappear. These all had to be looked after by our organization. And, unlike most of the other people who had "disappeared," these young men could not be seen about and homes had to be found for them on isolated farms or in the forests. Our ranks were further increased when the Allied bombings of German war industry became so severe that many of the Dutch workers who came back to Holland on leave thought it safer to go underground than to return. These people were not well thought of as their only reason for not working for the Germans seemed to be fear of their own skin. However, it was deemed better to accept them than to have them return and continue working in Germany as they would have had to do had we not provided for them.

By this time the number of those without any legal identity, or address, or means of sustenance was so vast that a special organization called "L O" was set up to administer them. This was much better, as now the "K P" had only to obtain the necessary ration and identity cards and "L O" would distribute them and look after the other necessary administrative problems.

The other thing that was urgently needed was money. During the early days this was begged or borrowed by members of the underground from

A member of the Dutch resistance leads a patrol from the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders through the streets of Zutphen. (Zutphen Museum Archives)



private individuals. This was obviously unsatisfactory when the amount of money required became so large. The thing was finally organized by a central committee who borrowed officially and gave notes. The money is to be returned with interest after the war. This amounted to a clandestine bond issue and has worked very well. This is how we still support ourselves even in liberated areas.

In November 1943 we nearly had a local catastrophe in Barneveld. We had managed to obtain three thousand buckshee ration cards. The Official who had helped us get them was arrested, was tortured, and told all. A raid was planned on our HQ, but a Dutch Police official who was trusted by the Germans, tipped us off in time. We escaped with our lives but lost our ration cards. We had, of course, secret telephone communications the length and breadth of Holland. This was a pre-war army system with permanent wires underground. The only time that we ever lost communications was when some British heavy bombers cut our wires. This complicated things somewhat as it was not easy to repair them. It was at this time that the Germans first discovered the existence of our communications. However, they never got to the bottom of it and it continued to give us invaluable service.

Last Phase

When the Allies started to push up through France and Belgium a semi-military resistance movement was organized. This was called the RVV. They were supplied with Sten guns, ammunition, and explosives by Great Britain. Their task was sabotage and terrorist activities. In the latter they never had very great success. German staff cars and lorries were stopped on the road at night and the occupants killed, but the retribution was so swift and so severe that it was not worthwhile. One of our hardest tasks was to weight the value of what we proposed to do with the inevitable retribution. It was not, however, until very recently that the Germans began executing large numbers of innocent people. What was more likely, as happened in PUTTEN where a German staff car was shot up, was for them to deport large numbers of able bodies men (in this case six

hundred) for enforced labour in Germany as well as the burning to the ground of a large number of houses.

On 5 September 1944 when we heard that Breda had fallen, we had our famous "*Dolle Dinsdag*" (Wild Tuesday). The Germans got the wind up and began making preparations to evacuate Holland. Many of the police and officials actually fled. All our organization, thinking the war was over, came out into the open and shot up German vehicles and did a good deal of sabotage. We had plenty of explosives and blew the Amersfoort-Apeldoorn, the Amersfoort-Zwolle and the Amersfoort-Barneveld railway bridges.

Things began to look bad again when the Allies were unsuccessful in capturing Arnhem. We were able to make a small contribution here, for, besides the 2,000 Airborne troops who managed to fight their way out to the Allied lines, some 250 of those captures later escaped and we took charge of them. We managed to get most of these back to the Allied lines, though it was extremely difficult as the Germans were evacuating the whole area north of the Rhine and we had to guide our "refugees" against the flow of traffic. However, we had come out into the open much too much and, with the Gestapo returning in force, arrests were made and confession extracted. The thing increased like a snow ball and we had to cease all activities for a time and devote all our energies to self preservation. There was one more major sabotage effort in November, by which we managed to suspend all railway traffic from west Holland into Germany for a period of two days.

The Last Fortnight

We had always maintained the closest liaison with the British, and since September have even had telephone communication with the armies across the Rhine. We knew when the Canadian drive was going to start, and further arms and explosive were supplied us by parachute. We did what we could to help, but it was extremely difficult as, in the face of the Canadian advance, the Boche got out as quickly as they could. The roads were crowded and the Germans were confiscating all bicycles to facilitate their own retreat. With so many armed men on the roads, unable to use our bicycles and of course



Nazi collaborator being rounded up by the Dutch resistance. (NAC PA 129782)

with no motor transport at our disposal, the business of getting about, shooting up German vehicles and blowing roads and bridges was rendered extremely difficult. One thing we were able to do was to contact the advancing Canadians and supply them with detailed information on defences, mine fields etc. We also provided them with guides, some half dozen of whom lost their lives while acting in this capacity.

When the Cape Breton Highlanders cleared Barneveld on the night of 16/17 April, we contacted the battalion commander and asked him if the liberation was permanent or whether there was any chance of them withdrawing and the Germans re-occupying the town. He said that it was permanent and that his or some other Canadian troops would remain in the town. The Underground immediately took over command of civil affairs. The mayor and the chief of police, though not collaborators, had been weak in their policy and were dismissed and replaced by people of our own choosing. Most of the civil police were old time accomplices of ours. Those who were not suitable were dismissed. There has been absolutely no break down in law and order. Unauthorized executions are forbidden and thus far have not taken place. About one hundred

collaborators have been arrested, and eight or ten girls have been gathered up and will have their heads shaved. This last is an expression of public indignation and, although not an official punishment, is tolerated by us. The collaborators will be detained until MG (Militair Gezag) decides what to do with them. This is a semi-military organization which was born in England and has drafted a special set of laws to deal with the existing situation. The drill is that they will take over control of civil affairs from the liberating Allied troops. However, I foresee some mild conflict on this score as we are on the spot and have been throughout the Occupation, are much more *aux fait* with the situation and in every case the Military have already deputed local government to us. If the MG are wise they will also make use of our organization. No doubt an amicable agreement will be reached. After all they do represent the only legal government.

Three Dutch SS were found hiding in this area yesterday. One was shot while trying to escape. The other two were rather seriously abused by some young men who had themselves been maltreated in a concentration camp. Incidents of this sort are regrettable and are not tolerated. The SS men will be held to be dealt with by MG. Their outlook is not good, however, as they have committed High Treason as well as, in many cases, all manner of illegal brutalities. It is probable that the law will have to be changed to allow Capital Punishment in view of the particular circumstances which exist.

Another thing which is going to have to change is our attitude towards authority. During the last five years the more daring people in the country have systematically flouted law and order. Highly organized and ingenious organizations have been developed and have carried out all manner of fraudulent and clandestine activities. For a period of five years the normal moral code has worked in reverse. It has been a case of knuckling under or outwitting the Gestapo. The latter were not easily outwitted and yet a large number of our boldest people have succeeded in so doing. It is, of course, to be hoped that there will be another complete reversal of attitude and that law enforcement will once more be as easy a matter in Holland as it was before the war.