

# Diary of a War Child

## Between Nazi sympathiser and victim of ideologies

By Dyonne Niehoff

### Foreword

The Netherlands declared itself neutral in September 1939, as a result of the invasion of Nazi Germany in Poland. Nevertheless, the German army invaded Holland on May 10, 1940. The Dutch army was outnumbered and equal opponent to the well organised German army. After the bombardment of the city of Rotterdam, the Dutch army capitulated on May 15, 1940.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-L23001  
Foto: Jäger | Mai 1940

**Marching through of German troops through Amsterdam May 1940**  
(Photo: Bundesarchiv, 183-L23001, open source, CC BY-SA 3.0 de)

The Dutch population was divided. On the one hand, there was much resistance; the communist resistance movement had a total member account of 25,000 people.

On the other hand, there were many Dutch who welcomed the Germans and who accepted the new circumstances and participated in the new Nazi regime.



**A 2-day protest strike (*Februaristaking*) against the anti-Semitic policies of the German administration in the Netherlands took place on February 1941, organized by communists, with the participation of almost 50.000 people – a rare anti-Nazi activity from a European civil society in these times**

(Photo: 30051000295938, Nederlandse Affiches, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis)

According to Hitler's ideology, many Dutch boys complied with his ideal image of the Aryan race. Hundreds of them were selected to attend the Reichsschule in Valkenburg. They were chosen based on their intelligence and courage, and to be educated to become high-ranking Nazi officials.



**German highranking SS-officers (Hanns Albin Rauten, August Heißmeyer, Friedrich Wimmer) pay a visit to the Dutch youngsters in uniform in the Reichsschule Valkenburg, 6 July 1943.**

(Photo: GaHetNa (Nationaal Archief NL, Collectie SPAARNESTAD PHOTO/NA/Anefo/Fotograafonbekend, CC Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 NL)

When The Netherlands were liberated in May 1945, many of these boys ended up in the concentration camp in Vught, where they were held captive together with thousands of putative Nazi sympathisers.

The following piece is based on interviews, documentaries and bibliographies of a few of those ‘chosen boys’ who attended the Reichsschule in the Netherlands. The events of the story are based on true events, but for the purpose of the story some dates have been altered. The purpose of this fictional diary is to provide the reader with an insight in the lives of these boys and their struggles to find their place in the post-war society.

## “My dear Diary ...”

### 1940

I abruptly awake from the sound of a slamming door. After initial confusion I slowly wake up and realise the slamming door means that father is home. Relying on the darkness of my room it must be in the middle of the night. I close my eyes and try to fall back asleep, but my head is already full of thoughts. For a second I consider going downstairs to see him, but I decide not to. Today, the boys at school followed me home again and one of them hit me hard in my face. I am afraid father would see the bruises and would visit the parents of the boys, who did this to me. I have to avoid that since that would only make it worse.

I am very proud of my father for being a member of parliament for the National-Socialist Movement, but my classmates use this as a reason to bully me. Father tried to explain to me that my bullies are not being raised with Hitler’s ideology, and that they misinterpreted his recent actions in Austria and Poland. Father is probably right about this, but I just wish my classmates would better understand why Hitler is a great leader and why he inspires me so much. I have asked father for a new picture of him for my eleventh birthday next week. Hopefully father will be able to spend the whole day with me, so we can play outside again, like we used to do so often. Thinking about my birthday I slowly fall back asleep, with a smile on my face.

### 1941

“Come on kids, sing with me!” Mr Mussert raises his hand in the air to indicate the rhythm, and together with my sister we sing the battle song my father’s friends just wrote at our kitchen table. I see in their faces that they are content with what they hear, and when I turn to my father I can see he is very proud of me. I look back at Mr Musser and see that he is satisfied as well, which gives a feeling of great joy since I find him very intriguing and want to make a good impression on him. His speeches about the ideology of Hitler and the superior role of the Germanic race always leave me speechless. My father has not told me about Mr Mussert’s exact position in the Nazi government, but I know that he is a very important man.

After a night full of singing, my father tells me to go to bed. I do not want to leave, but I know I have to because otherwise I would be too tired to go to school tomorrow. I told

father yesterday that since Hitler's army came to the Netherlands, the bullying and the hostile environment increased every day. I tried to hide my bruises from him, as well as the fact that since a few weeks I have no more friends left, but I think father knows since there are no boys coming over anymore to play with me. I feel very alone at school.

## 1942

After a few weeks at the Reichsschule, this place already feels like home to me, I cannot believe how happy I am! After a tough selection process I was among the few who were selected to be educated in a new school in Valkenburg. I have never seen my father look so proud at me as during the day we received the news: he picked me up and raised me high in the air, and hugged me so hard I was afraid he would break me. He had tears in his eyes but I was very proud of myself that I did not cry. I have been selected to become one of the Nazi's new great leaders, and these strong courageous men do not cry.

I had no trouble at all saying goodbye to my previous school or my classmates: they all had been ignoring me for weeks anyway. During the selection process I often thought of them and how badly I wanted to leave whenever the selection tasks were hard. And yes, it was tough, you can hardly imagine it. The first day of the selection period they informed us that we have to adhere to Hitler's image of an ideal Germanic boy: we have to be tall, Aryan looking boys, who are strong and brave, courageous and bring honour upon themselves and the Germanic race. In addition we have to be intelligent, interested in culture and music, and willing to dedicate our lives to studying the Nazi ideology on which our new society is formed. I am still very proud that I adhere to this ideal – to the ideal of Hitler's elite. To show our dedication to him all boys have a picture of Hitler in their room, but my teacher was especially content with me when I showed her how I tape a picture of Hitler to my chest every morning, so he is close to my heart.

I miss my mother, father, brother and sister very much, since I only see them during the holiday now. But I know how proud I make them and I have met so many new friends to spend all my free time with.

My favourite part of our curriculum are all the music lessons we have. Every boy at our school plays an instrument and is part of the school orchestra. We also practice many sports and spend a lot of time outside. Of course we also study history and political ideology, to make us realise how many obstacles the Germanic race has overcome. Our race has been attacked many times by other races, which are jealous of our superiority, but our most significant enemy are the Jewish people. You can see clearly throughout our history how the Jews have tried to destroy us, but luckily many heroic men have led our race to superiority. During our class today one of my classmates asked our teacher to explain why the Jews from his home town have been deported, so she explained to us that during times of war, everyone has to make sacrifices. The superior Germanic race is striving to create a better world, some of our boys are even making the ultimate sacrifice – death. In order to repay for all our sacrifices, the Jews have to contribute as well. After they have paid their debts they will move to their own Jewish country, my teacher said. I think that would be

best for all, since history has clearly shown that Jews are unable to be a part of the Germanic Reich.

During the last fifteen minutes of our class, our teacher asked us about our dreams and wishes for the future, and much to the approval to many of my classmates I expressed my wish of becoming the new Minister of Culture of the Deutsche Reich. I hope one day this dream will come true.

## 1943

Initially I was nervous about leaving my school for a trimester in Cologne, but I have met seven new friends who are all in the school choir with me. Yesterday I sent a letter to my father to inform him about my position, I can hardly wait for his reply since he will probably be very proud of me for obtaining such a prestigious position in the school even though I am just fourteen years old and all the other boys in the choir are seventeen.

In a few hours we have another rehearsal, and I hope we will go for some ice cream later, like we did last week. Usually we are not allowed to leave the school but my choir has special privileges. One of the boys tells me they all go to the battle field after graduation. I wonder what that would be like and they promise to send me letters and postcards, since I will go back to Valkenburg next week. I am sad to leave my new friends behind, but I know I have to finish my education to be able to serve Hitler.

## April 1944

Suddenly we hear men shouting and the truck stops. I do not understand what is happening and based on the facial expressions of my classmates they are confused as well. Suddenly, we realise the men are screaming in English, and for a second our hearts stop beating and panic starts to break out in the truck. They open the doors and we see that our worst fear has become reality: we are captured by the British Army. They yell at us and demand that we step out of the truck. We do, with our arms in the air while they all point their guns at us. They have our commander at gunpoint as well, he is sitting on his knees with his arms in his neck. He looks at us with tears in his eyes and mumbles: "I am sorry boys, I am so sorry, but I had to. I could not let you go to the frontline, the Soviets would have slaughtered you in seconds. I am so sorry."

He had picked us up yesterday at our school. We were needed at the front, even though we were only sixteen years old and had not finished our program yet. We did not mind, because we could not wait to be an official part of Hitler's Army and have been talking about it for hours last night since we were too excited to go to sleep. I still try to adjust to the fact that our commander never had the intention to let us serve for our leader. He betrayed us, by driving us directly to the British Army who is already present in The Netherlands. I hate him, I hate him deeply, since he robbed me of my chance to show what I have learned over the past years. We could have beaten the Soviets, we could have beaten the British, we could have led Hitler's nation to victory. But instead, we have been captured by a group of

British soldiers. I have no idea what they will do to us and I have never been so scared in my life.

### May 1945

My brother is dead. My brother who never had any interest in politics was killed in action. The guards told me yesterday and said they would hope that more members of my traitor-family had died. I have no idea where my parents are, and I fear the worst.

I know that they are going to kill me, I can see it in their faces. They beat us, scream at us, and when they are drunk they become dangerous. The British Army handed us over to these young boys, most of them belonged to the resistance movement during the war. They locked us up in a camp with the name Bergen-Belsen, and we are forced to live in small barracks, which smell of disinfectant. From our barrack we can see the fence around the camp. I have no idea why this camp is here and for how long we will stay in here. I am hungry, cold, and I just want to go home.

### 1945

It was all just a lie. The system I am raised in, the system I was willing to give my life for, and this system is responsible for the death of millions. The rug is pulled out under my feet; I do not know what to do anymore. Everything I used to believe in turned out to be a lie.

We are being re-educated, as they call it. After a few weeks in Bergen-Belsen we were transported to Huizen, where teachers came to tell us about the war. They show pictures of extermination camps, of many dead bodies, of starving children. It is all too much, but there is no time to process. When we are not in class, we have to work outside. We have to dig earth, load it in trucks, and bring it a few hundred meters away to another place where it seems like we are building a new mountain or something. They do not tell us why we have to do this and it feels like a punishment every time.

I feel alone, unwanted. I am not part of the Dutch people anymore; they despise me. I have nothing anymore; I am nothing. I am seventeen years old, have no education, no friends, and no future. My parents are in exile; I do not know when they will be released or when I can see them. I am all by myself.

### 1947

The tension in the office of my employer is unbelievable. All my colleagues are there, they all stare at me. Everybody is silent, perhaps they want me to say something? Explain why I have been lying about my last name for the past year? It was my employer's idea, a Jewish man who owns an insurance company where only Jewish people work. After I was declined at multiple secondary schools because of my background, this man – a friend of my uncle, who had temporarily offered me shelter after I was allowed to leave the re-education

camp after one-and-a-half-year – offered me this job on the condition I would adopt my uncle’s last name and would not inform anyone about my background. I have kept that secret until five minutes ago, when my employer informed all my colleagues about my background and revealed real name. Everyone in the room is still quiet, until one of my colleagues, who I have befriended over the last year, opens his mouth. “It is okay. We are okay, we will all accept you for who you are because we know what it feels like to be judged based on your background, or how it is to suffer. We understand what you must have been going through, we are here for you.”

## 1949

He looks at me with tears in his eyes, and I have a hard time to keep my emotions under control. I know that he is crying not because of me, but because of all the suffering that has come upon him during and after the war, due to his Jewish roots. He has lost almost his entire family in extermination camps.

He is my infantry company commander and has just informed me that he knew who I was when I entered to do my six weeks mandatory military service, but that he had decided to try to forget that and treat me just like everybody else. And now we are standing here, two grown man, crying, because he just informed me about the recommendation he made about me at the Officer school, and that they have accepted me. I cannot believe he has done this for me, and I will be eternally grateful.

## 1951

I have just finished my training and I am officially a reserve officer now. From now on, when someone asks me what I have done in my life I inform them about my military grade. For me, my title is a stamp of approval, a confirmation that I belong to the ‘good guys’. I finally feel like I have rehabilitated and are part of the Dutch people again. They have finally accepted me and welcomed me back as one of their own. I feel a weight falling off my shoulders, and a feeling of pride that is growing in me. I am not a victim, I am not guilty, I do not have to go through life with my head held low and full of shame.

## 1955

Dear Father,

Here I am, standing at your grave. I look down on your tombstone and I am angry. Angry at you, but also at myself because I never dared to confront you and you were too afraid to take the first step and now, it is too late. I will never be able to ask you whether you regret what you did, or if you feel partially responsible for the death of millions of your fellow countrymen. There are so many questions, so many unresolved issues between us.

Did you ever realise what consequences your actions had for me? How I suffered? How much it hurts to be isolated, excluded by society, to be so lonely and hurt because no-body wants to be associated with you? Do you know what it feels like to be the only boy in the street who cannot finish his education because no school would accept him? My whole world fell

apart, I was a boy without a future, and you were not there to support me during the most difficult times of my life. I had to crawl back on my feet all by myself; and I did. I did with help of others, with the help of those who you taught me would be the enemy, would be the ones that would bring the end of our civilisation. These men helped me, when you were gone.

The only thing that I demand from you, as your son, was something you will never be able to give me. I need an apology. An apology from my father, for the role he played in my failed youth, but I know I will never receive that.

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