

# The Neervoorts in Bandung Berg en Dal en 8 Kooien

[marliesterborg@gmail.com](mailto:marliesterborg@gmail.com)



When the Spoors arrived, the cool mountain village where the Europeans lived, away from the hot noisy harbor town Makassar, was accessible only by donkey cart. When they left, a good, well-kept motorway joined Makassar and the European quarters. This is an example of the ways in which Dutch colonial officials joined hands with Dutch companies to develop Indië, to their own and mutual benefit, if not for the indigenous population.

It also gives a preview of the way in which the Neervoorts and the Spoors supported each other in the difficult times ahead. It was a friendship that was to last through thick and thin.



After the Neervoorts had left for Bandoeng, little André was born. In André's baby book Anna comments on the perfect road that led from their home in Maros to Makassar, as she describes the rush to the military hospital, where her baby was born.

“And then at a speed of 70 kilometers to Makassar, made possible because father (André) had the road kept up beautifully, which wasn't too difficult because cousin Bart had done an excellent job constructing it.”

Anna Spoor in André's baby

book, 1925



## Neervoort & Schlahmilch - Orphans



### **Bart Theodoor Neervoort**

was born in The Hague in 1891, and named after his father, following a Dutch tradition of repeating family names. Born in 1857, his father was in the painting business, working for himself. Married in 1887, he died in 1898 at the age of 41, when his son was eight years old.



Bart's mother was Johanna Maria Neervoort-Lucas, a devout evangelical Christian. Here she is pictured in her best dress, with elaborate collar, in a studio reading a book, in the stiff pose characteristic for early photography (keep still, don't move), contrasted with the romantic misty moonlit background. Johanna Maria's life was anything but romantic. When her husband died she had to work as a cleaning lady, for there was no state support for widows. Even so she could not afford to bring up her four children. Being a devout Evangelical Lutheran, she managed to place the two eldest, Bart and his brother Cornelis in the Lutheran orphanage in The Hague, so that they could get a decent education. (An 'orphan' was defined as a child who lacked a father to provide for him.)



Medalion for the founding of the Lutheran Orphanage in The Hague in 1763.

Image of the pelican, a bird thought to feed its chicks from its own breast. The pelican is symbolic for Christ, who gave his body and blood save us.

Text: above in the sun. 'I have not forsaken you.'

Below: 'Orphans are those who have no father'

Around: 'The Lord let the manna rain on them (the orphans) for them to eat, (as he did the Jews in the desert.) Left the boys, right the girls, catching the manna.'

At the orphanage Bart was known for his unorthodox pranks. He was an outgoing, sociable and often naughty boy, for whom being allowed to wear long pants and top hat instead of the orphanage uniform and cap was a memorable occasion.

It was the policy of the orphanage to equip the children for life by providing funds for them to follow a practical training. There was no state support for any further education at the time. Bart became an apprentice builder. In the evenings he went to the free of charge Hague art school. He excelled in both. He was a talented young man, but he lacked the social connections or financial support normally provided by more affluent fathers.

For people like Bart Neervoort Indië offered opportunities. The Dutch colony was a great place for young men who lacked the social background or finances to succeed in Holland. For Bart it was a challenge he would live up to. In Indië there was space not only to rise socially, but also to develop one's own initiative, and earn good money into the bargain. In 1912, just turned twenty, Bart Theodoor Neervoort sailed to the Dutch East Indies.

His first contract was with the Nederlands-Indische Gas Maatschappij. Initially set up for gas street lighting, it had expanded into the rapidly developing field of electricity.

### VAM

In Makassar Bart met Jan Schuurman Volker, who was just setting up an Indië branch of the Dutch VAM, Volker Aanneming Maatschappij (Volker Contracting Company). These practical adventurous, humane men, both with a sense of humor, got on like a house on fire. Jan Schuurman asked Bart to join him. The partnership was to last until Volker's death in 1938. J. S. was known as the Nestor for the contracting business in Indië. 10 years his elder. J. S. was for Bart not only an employer but a coach and friend.

Bart felt he now had enough ground under his feet to be able to marry his childhood sweetheart.

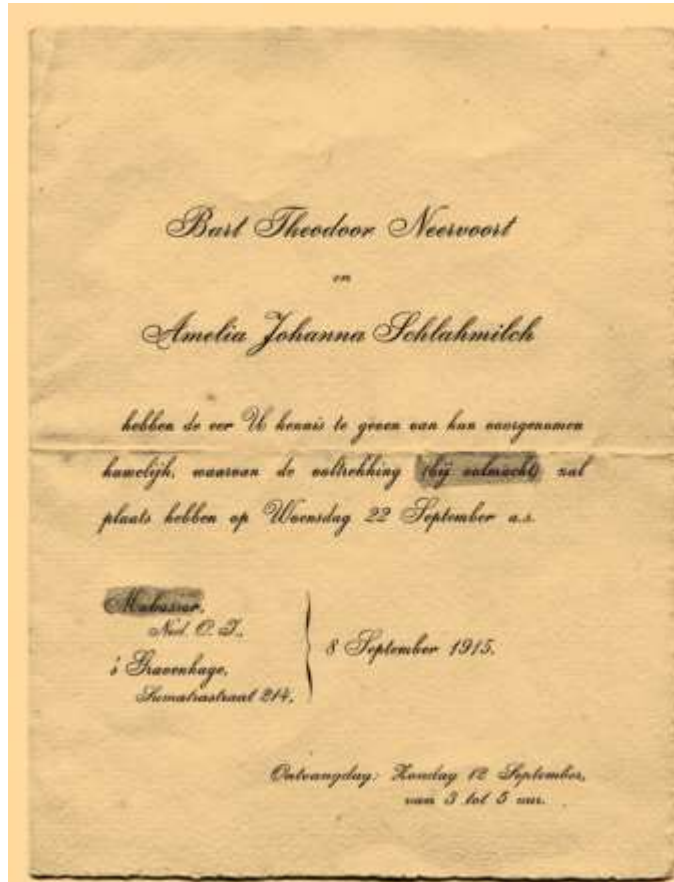
Photo thanks to Sjaak Bons, J. S. Schuurman at a party in his honour, Banka, 1930





Makassar was traditionally a port for spices, but had also been a centre of the slave trade, even after the Dutch abolished it in 1860. As an important harbour or gateway between West and East, it had more than its share of violence. In 1660 the Dutch VOC (Associated East India Company) defeated the Portuguese based in Makassar. In 1667 the Dutch attacked the Makassar Sultan to secure a trade monopoly, especially in cloves. There was immense violence on both sides with the Dutch allowing some 5000 prisoners of war to starve, and taking other Makassar people as slaves. These actions confirmed the VOC trade monopoly necessary to keep up prices, which would have tumbled if the produce of the fertile islands had been sold on the free market. Makassar remained an important harbour on the route from the West to the Eastern straight between Celebes and Borneo. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century it was firmly controlled by the Dutch colonial authorities, collaborating where possible with the local sultans. So Makassar 1915 was a real beginning for Bart's future career and family life. It was from Makassar that Bart Neervoort married Amelia Schlahmilch.





Karel Thierrij

The wedding was 'bij volmacht,' 'by proxy,' or as the Dutch expression goes, 'with the glove.' Single ladies were not advised to travel unprotected to the colonies, and the groom could afford neither the time (weeks at sea), nor the costs of attending his own wedding. So he had to ask another man to represent him at the altar, (presumably not in bed). For this Karel Thierrij, the girls' warden, stood in, wearing a glove belonging to the groom – the bride was marrying with the glove of the bridegroom. Onlookers giggled when they saw the young bride led to the altar by an old man. "He must have had a lot of money to catch her," they joked.

**Amelia Schlahmilch** was born in The Hague in 1895 as in the daughter of Frederik Conrad Hendrik Schlahmilch and Sophia Wilhelmina van der Stijl.



Right:  
Frederik Conrad  
Hendrik  
Schlahmilch

Extreme left:  
Sophia van der  
Stijl



Her father was a tailor like his own father, and later became an accountant, leading a choir more or less professionally in his free time. Amelia's father, Frederick, was an accountant with a passion for music, which he expressed in his free time. He became the conductor of a young men's Christian choir, which he greatly improved by introducing girls. That led to great success, and even now this choir, which started under the name 'Oefening en Stichting' (Practice and Edification), is well-known under the name Residentie Bachkoor, (residentie refers to The Hague, the residence of the Dutch government). The inspiration of this choir was to develop young people, body, mind and soul, a goal from the spiritual and cultural movement in Holland in the last part of the nineteenth century called the 'Réveil', signifying a spiritual awakening. Under Frederick Schlahmilch the choir performed for the first time in The Hague concert hall, called 'Diligentia.'

Amelia was the third of four sisters, Wilhelmina (Mien), Sophie (Fietje), Amelia (Melie) and Johanna Maria Catherina, (after her mother's mother) nicknamed 'Zus', as was the tradition with the youngest sister of a Dutch family.



In May 1901, the mother of the family, Sophia died at the age of 43, due to intestinal problems that were incurable in those days. Half a year later, in 1901, Frederick also died, at the age of 48 of grief, intensified by the depressive gene which, as it turned out later, was present in the Schlahmilch family. Heartbroken, he was convinced that he could only be a burden to his children. Having arranged for his daughters to be brought up – in pairs of two – by two aunts, he may possibly have taken his own life. Suicide was a taboo in those days; even the church did not allow a proper burial if the cause of death became known.

His brother in law, Karel Thierrij, became the guardian of the four Schlahmilch orphan girls. Karel Hendrik Thierrij was born in The Hague in 1847 and died there in 1929. He had been married to Frederick's sister, Amelia Petronella Schlahmilch (1845-1887). They were an older couple who were married only in 1885, when Amelia was 40. She was one of only two children of a family of six surviving into adulthood. Child mortality was high in those days.

Only two years after they were married, Karel lost his wife Amelia and his only child during childbirth. To keep him company and do the housework, his sister Keetje Thierrij came to live with him. The Thierrij's knew the family Schlahmilch well, as family but also as neighbours. When their third child was born she was named Amelia after Karel Thierrij's wife.

Karel was a painter, just like Bart Theodoor Neervoort. He was a member of the Lutheran church just like Bart's mother. He was especially active in supporting the Lutheran orphanage, which was to become the new home of the four orphan girls.

Under the leadership of the eldest, Mien, then twelve years old, the girls decided that they would prefer not to be split up between the uncles and aunts, but wanted at all costs to stay together. The only possibility was the Lutheran orphanage in The Hague Karel Thierrij and Keetje did what they could for the girls. Other aunts the girls often visited were Anna Poldervaart-van der Stijl, and George van der Stijl and his wife aunt Celia.



When allowed these weekends 'off,' the girls would immediately change their clothing, ridding themselves of the hateful the black and dark red uniforms signifying that the orphans had been 'abandoned' by their (deceased) parents, and stood alone in the world. As said Bart Theodoor Neervoort, born in the same

year as Amelia, lived in the same orphanage. We know that Amelia married Bart and left for Indië, but what happened to the other three girls?

The oldest girl, Mien, became a schoolteacher in Hazerswoude, a farmer's village. There she met the bulb grower Krijn Niemantsverdriet. They married and had a baby daughter named Sophia Adriana, nicknamed Puck, 'little one,' because she was as small as a child. Under economic pressure after World War I, they immigrated to the USA, where they started a flower and bulb company. Melie and Mien saw each other rarely, but kept up a regular correspondence. Several fascinating letters from Melie to Mien have survived, passing into the inheritance of Mien's granddaughter, Suzanne.

Fietje became a nurse, first for aristocratic families, later at the posh Amsterdam Prinsengracht hospital. After a tooth operation she fell victim to a manic episode and was hospitalized. Her niece, also called Fietje (Dekker), remembers having to visit her aunt in the psychiatric hospital. She was dead scared, hearing all the screaming going

on from the long corridors. Then to her dismay, she had to sit on her aunt's lap, who made a fuss of her because she was supposedly her namesake. She wasn't. They were simply both named after their mother and respectively grandmother, Sophia van der Stijl.

After a time Fietje was released but she became manic again and spent many years in mental hospital.

The youngest girl Zus became a teacher, like her sister Mien, often staying with her sister in Hazerswoude. There she met Jan Dekker, whom she married in 1920. They stayed in Hazerswoude and had 7 children. Jan was rather a potentate, always reserving the best piece of meat for him, for example. After Jan's death, with whom marriage also had not been very happy; Zus became very depressed, and then seized by a religious fervour. She believed she had a religious calling. She was diagnosed as suffering from manic depression, probably inherited from her father. She was hospitalized for a short while and received medication, which in those days was relatively crude in its effect. As her daughter Fietje



relates, the light left her eyes and she lost interest in life, not even able to enjoy her many grandchildren.

Amelia also became a nurse, looking after twins, here in her nurse's uniform.

Amelia was the luckiest of the four girls, marrying her childhood love Bart Neervoort. In July 1915 she moved from the orphanage on Lombard Street to the home of Karel Thierrij, Sumatra Street 214. It seemed to presage Melie's happy years in Sumatra. From the Sumatra Street she wedded her Oom (uncle) Karel Thierrij, standing in for Bart, her husband to be. Oom Karel gave her a Bible which would keep her company to the end of her life.

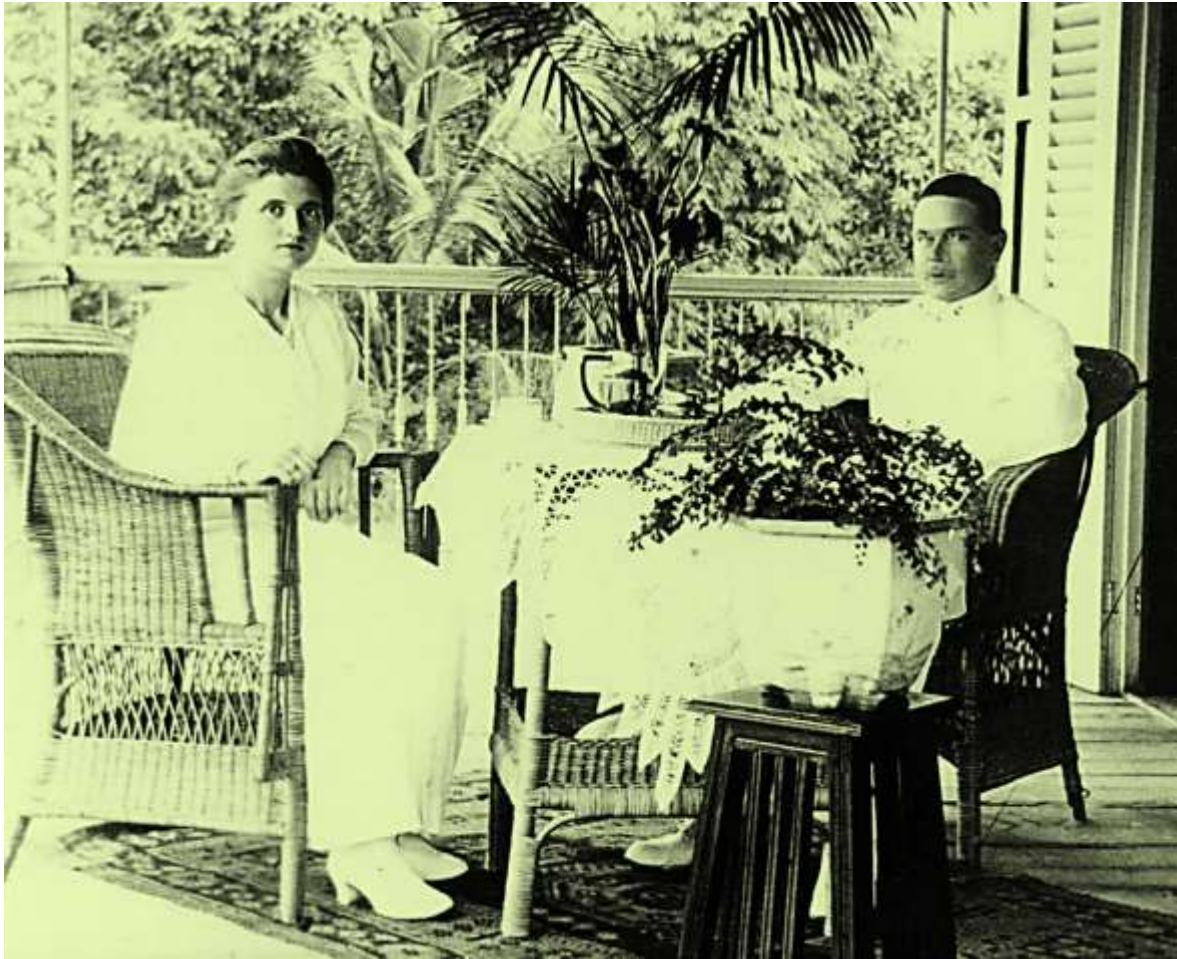
One can imagine the sociable Bart out there in Makassar longing to take part in the reception on Sumatra Street on the Sunday afternoon ten days before the wedding. His mother was there, and his brother Cornelis, who had been with him in the orphanage. Many other orphanage friends were there, first and foremost Mien, Fietje and Zus, his wife's sisters. Of course Oom Karel was there as the stand-in groom and host for the day, along with his sister Tante Keetje. Tante Anna Poldervaart, with whom Melie had spent so many weekends, and her six-years-younger cousin Anna,



both admired the bride on her move to the unknown adventure in Indië. For Melie the party was also a farewell, to family she would not see for a long time.

Bart was in Indië as a bachelor, but when Melie came they would form their own proper household, something they especially desired, having been brought up in an orphanage. She took trunks filled with linen and clothes and curtains to a country where nothing much was available for sale. She embarked in Rotterdam, sailing round Spain and through the Mediterranean to the Suez Canal. The passengers were nervous. The Netherlands was neutral, but sea voyages were risky. Both British and Germans used submarines to attack each other's ships and there were sea mines. A neutral ship could be hit by 'accident,' as in the case of neutral American ships torpedoed by German submarines, which prompted the USA finally to enter the war. In those weeks at sea she must have learned great deal from other more experienced passengers describing for her the life awaiting her. They told her how to hire and manage servants, something the orphan girl had never experienced. What medicines should one store in a tropical household? What should one, wear, eat? Who to associate with. How to communicate with the 'inlanders'. She eagerly sucked up all the information and advice she could get.

Once through the Suez Canal the passenger ships were safe to sail on through the Indian Ocean to the harbour of Batavia, Tanjung Priok. There Bart would be, exuberantly waiting on the quay for his bride. Would he take her for a short honeymoon to the famous Hotel des Indes in Batavia? Or go a little further to the cool higher Buitenzorg, where the Governor General lived, to give Melie a chance to get used to the hot climate.



Child raising in Indië - Oil Boom and Depression

After the honeymoon the Neervoort-Schlahmilch couple sailed to Soerabaja, a hot and noisy city. It was named after two mythical animals. Soera meaning shark and Baja from crocodile; who supposedly fought for primacy of the Soerabaja River. This ancient harbour town was of great importance to the Dutch, and dredging was an important and financially attractive activity. The town with its crowds, colours, noises, and scents might have been overwhelming for Melie, used as she was to the quiet of The Hague, but luckily her djongos and baboes could do the shopping. A special Baboe would look after the baby.

Having always longed for an ordinary household, Amelia received an extraordinary one. From one day to the next she was promoted from a servile role of nurse/nanny to the head of a household with many servants. Djongos, men, and Baboes, women, for every conceivable task.

The Dutch manager of a household in Indië had, it seemed, nothing to do except giving orders. Perhaps that was best in a climate in which Europeans could hardly manage to keep up any menial tasks over an extended period, having trouble even in surviving the heat and the onslaught of malaria.

For a young married woman pregnancy was a happy burden. Melie immediately became pregnant. Assuming that she left Holland straight after the wedding, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 1915, spent some 6 weeks on board, and fell into the arms of her Bart in Tanjung Priok on 10<sup>th</sup> November, her first pregnancy was a close thing.

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The Neervoort household was often on the move, following the VAM contracts from one harbour town to another. Within a year or two the family moved from Soerabaja to Bandoeng, a Dutch built mountain town in the Preanger Mountains with superb views across the luscious valleys to the volcanoes. It was a favourite with Europeans, with its cool, malaria-free climate, allowing hiking into the luscious mountains and up the side of volcanoes. The connections with Batavia were excellent, for it lay on the great Post Road through Java and on the railway line running through magnificent scenery. That is where you wanted to be. Bandoeng was alive with new initiatives. A special company, VAM Woningbouw was set up to get onto the booming market for luxury villas in that smart fashionable white town.

Here Dutch social life was intense, revolving around the rather forbidding Club, the Soos Concordia, an all-white neo-classic building. Melie now had a new problem — to fit into this chattering, gossipy, hierarchical company. She and her husband were newcomers and were treated with condescension, obliged to listen to endless advice on the do's and don'ts of colonial life. The couple had next to no social experience, but Bart had the pluck to talk himself through and into any social gathering. Melie was all sweet smiles in the background, but her moral judgement was active within.





It was in Bandoeng that Frits was born, fully named as Fredrik Coenraad Hendrik after grandfather Schlahmilch who had died so tragically. Bart is holding the baby dressed in his white tropical suit, absolutely



sure that if it is spoiled, the washer Baboe will immediately provide another, spotless and starched as called for.

In 1920 the family was back in Makassar, from where Bart had first sent his glove to Karel Thierrij. Here little Bart was born, named after Opa Neervoort who had died when his son Bart Theodoor was 8 years old. Thus the two grandfathers, Bart and Frederick Coenraad Hendrik, who had left Bart and Melie orphans at the age of eight, were honoured in the two boys.

Little Bart, nicknamed Broer,  
on his first birthday  
Maros, Celebes, 30th July, 1923



couple.

1925 again found the Neervoorts in Bandoeng.

There Amelia was born. She was named after Amelia Schlahmilch, the sister of Frederik, the aunt Melie had never known, because she died in childbirth when married to Karel Thierrij. Indeed this unknown aunt was namesake to Melie herself.

Thus it happened that the family had two Amelia's and two Bart's. Dutch tradition brought a solution to this confusion, by calling little Bart 'Broer' (brother) and even smaller Melie, 'Zus', or sister.

It must have been difficult to be so constantly on the move. What to take, and indeed who to take was a problem Melie decided in her own decisive way. The cook and yes of course the children's Baboe accompanied them from town to town.

From the left: Karel, Baboe (name unknown), Little Bart, Frits



## **The Great Depression**

Then in 1929, came the Wall Street crash, dragging in its fall much of the world economy. Oil was hit, and with it the Neervoorts, whose living was dependent on oil. The BPM was VAM's main client for infrastructure – housing for its European employees and the dredging of major oil ports. The drop in world-wide economic activity had great repercussions for oil production and associated activities. The VAM housing, infrastructure and dredging company was hit badly.

In June 1930 the family returned to The Hague not knowing what the future would bring. Of course it was wonderful to see everyone. Melie was reunited for the time being with two of her sisters, although her favourite Mien was an ocean away.. For Karel, Frits, Broer and Zus, it was a marvellous time, full of wonders they had never experienced before.



Coming by ship to Genoa, it was a short train trip to the mountains. They started their stay in Europe in Switzerland, in Interlaken. They visited the famous Jungfrauoch, a railway high in the Alps and a Swiss engineering feat that must have appealed to the men's technical mind. Expanses of snow-covered mountains must have caused a sensation for these youngsters used to the tropics with its smoky volcanoes. Frits remembers the snow as freezing cold.





Then there was Scheveningen,  
the chic seaside resort of The Hague,  
Melie and Bart's favourite place in Holland, perhaps since their childhood. Bringing  
their own children there must have been fun.

Boating, building sandcastles and irrigation works was fun for the boys. They all  
enjoyed eating 'poffertjes' – little pancakes covered in butter and sugar.



However their stay in Holland was not an altogether happy time. Bart worried how to survive in this time of crisis. There was no security system in place. As a child he had had first-hand experience of poverty, and he was determined not to reduce his family to that state. But how? Moes' health was poor and she had to stay in a nursing home for several weeks. The future seemed to hold only uncertainties. It could, however, not be denied that Karel and Frits were of grammar school age, and there was no grammar school anywhere near Pladjoe. Besides, Karel was very difficult to manage, if not altogether hopeless. The only solution seemed to be placing him in a very severe environment. He was sent to the Wullings Institute, a strict boarding school in a villa in Voorschoten, located in spacious parkland, conveniently close to Scheveningen. Placing one's son at a rather expensive Catholic boarding school was quite a desperate step for the sober Protestant Neervoorts.

Luckily Frits was easier and cheaper to place. He went to an ordinary grammar school staying with a 'nice' Protestant family. They turned out to be cold, critical Christians who closed the curtains on Sunday afternoon to drink jenever and play cards without being seen. Frits hated it there. It must have been difficult for mother Melie to leave her boys behind, but that was the life of people in the Indies.

There was no skype let alone email. Long distance telephoning was in its infancy and of course far too expensive for personal use. Moes did her best to continue the family life via letters. The sea post took about 5 weeks. Nevertheless the family ties were close. Frits and Karel sent a present to their 9 year old brother and 6 year old sister. Moes wrote back from Bandoeng in June 1932:



“Your parcel has arrived. It’s lovely, thank you. Just the right choice! Zusje was charmed by the handkerchiefs. Broer immediately took his tent outside and started setting it up. He wanted to have his dinner served there in the evening. He felt every inch the Red Indian, and started nagging me for an Indian suit as well. Of course I will make him one but I wanted to give it to him as a surprise on his birthday.”

Typical conversations between ordinary people, but over extraordinary distances. Over such distances the memory grows fonder.

Doing his homework in his cold room in the cold Dutch house Frits imagined the exciting life of his Broer and Zus – ‘you lucky ones staying at home,’ he sighed.

## Tjoemboeloeit (now spelled Ciumbuleuit)

Then the idea was born to develop a former tea plantation into a housing area for the small and large purse.



View of Tjoemboeloelit with 'inlanders' harvesting the dry rice. When Bart Neervoort developed this area, he allowed them to stay in their kampong( village without paying rent. He required only a yearly presentation of the first rice harvest to his daughter Zus. Indonesian artist (Kromo?)

## Economic recovery in Bandoeng

In the meanwhile business had again gained momentum. During the two Depression years in Holland, Bart had not sat still. He was not the man to sit by the waters of Scheveningen and weep. He was a Neervoort, being in the dumps was a trigger for extra energy and focus to find the way back up. A Neervoort sees a crisis as a challenge.

One day in Scheveningen, when the children had all been put or put themselves in bed, the Neervoorts were sitting talking to the Spoors. By coincidence, Anna Poldervaart suggested Bart contact her brother, who was the town architect in Bandoeng. Arie Poldervaart was looking for a way of triggering new economic activity. After all, the whole town, which was booming in the twenties, suffered under the Depression.

Bart contacted Arie. The matter at hand was urgent. Bart had a family to feed and business to boost. He was located at VAM Dutch head office. Luckily since 1929, there were new, quicker though decidedly more expensive ways of contacting Bandoeng from The Hague.

In 1928 the first experiments had taken place with short wave radio communication. On 7 January 1929 the radio telephone service was opened officially for the public by the Queen-mother Emma, with the words: "Hallo Bandoeng, hallo Bandoeng hoort u mij?" ("hello Bandoeng, hello Bandoeng do you hear me?") Special 'Indië cells' were opened in the big cities. Clients had to wear earphones sitting in a small room with the PTT employee who managed the small mechanism on the table around which everyone sat.



For Bart Neervoort this was an unexpected opportunity to discuss business with partners in Bandoeng. Bart was fascinated. He travelled around Holland inspecting the results of the social housing movement, possible now thanks to low-cost municipal government loans. The housing was inspired by socialist architects doing their best to make the housing comfortable, attractive and cheap by using local materials. Typical examples are the social housing of the Amsterdam School, and the Haarlem garden estate by van Loghem. Here was the proof that, if the municipal government would provide the initial investment, architectural skills could be used to create beautiful low cost social housing.





Bart visited the  
Rietveld  
Schröder house  
completed in  
1924.



He spoke to the architects working on Villa Sonneveld in Rotterdam. He began to develop ideas of his own. His dream was to build a whole park full of such white villas, in a style manifesting both a modern, business-like attitude and a belief in progress. If only.....

The discussions with Arie Poldervaart turned out to be especially fruitful. Arie was a Delft-trained architect with a great love for Bandoeng, the city where he worked. He was also able to pull the right strings. More important, Arie was working on some novel ideas. The first was to promote social housing for which the municipal authorities could provide cheap land. It could also provide cheap mortgages on a 'huur-koop basis.' Rent paid by the inhabitants would count as pay back for the mortgage.



A joint venture was the development of Ampasiet on which they gained a patent together. These were easy usable building panels allowing faster building at lower costs. Two panels were put together with a space of air in between as heat isolation. This was the principle of the so-called spouw muur, traditionally used in Dutch building, to keep out damp and cold. Keeping out damp was very important in the tropics, but of course Bart was interested in keeping out the heat rather than the cold. He and Arie experimented with mixing waste materials from local sugar plantations with the concrete. This was Ampasiet, easy low cost and practically non inflammable. As Bandoeng town architect Arie Poldervaart was looking for was a company that would be interested in building small houses for a small profit. Of course there was an economic crisis. For these men crisis meant challenge. These gentlemen backed the Keynesian approach – that by doing counter cyclical investments in the public sector, the economy could be given an important boost. To put these ideas into practice, Bart's company, which already had a housing department, set up a special daughter company called VAM Kleinwoningbouw. At one point Arie left the municipal government and joined Bart's company, perhaps tired of slow government bureaucracy, and hoping to share in the profit from their invention Ampasiet.

Bart had learned fromn childhood not to look down on persons with a low income. Social housing, so far so good. However Neervoort also wanted to use his artistic talent for designing an building luxury villas, built according to the latest architectural styles.

In terms of architectural innovation, a lot was going on in Holland.

Bart's company was able to buy, at a reasonable cost, a perfectly located building site with plots for a number of villas. It was on a former government tea plantation called Tjoemboeloelit.

It was a daring but feasible proposition, provided that VAM Woningbouw did not just sit around waiting for clients, but got to work right away, developing the extensive plot to make it ready for building. Risky but dynamic was the idea of just starting to construct the first villas at their own cost and for their own use, That is for Jan Schuurman Volker and Bart Th.



Neervoort. In that way Volker would gain the trust of the customers.

It was with these perspectives that the family left The Hague in 1932, leaving behind the two boys, but determined to provide, at the shortest possible notice, a new home for them in Bandoeng. With Arie Poldervaart Bart discussed the idea of developing a whole area, and starting building at VAM's own cost, instead of waiting for clients. The economy needed a boost and VAM was prepared to provide one. Poldervaart could provide the land, part of Tjoemboeloelit, a former government tea plantation. Here they are inspecting the area, somewhat higher and therefore cooler than Bandoeng city, with beautiful views across the sawa's, the rice fields, to the volcanos. Bart couldn't wait to get started.

Thus Bart became a project developer, organizing the infrastructure for the whole area. He would walk around with his assistant pointing with his walking stick: here the road, there the sewage system, here the plots of land. The obvious thing was to build first a house for VAM director Jan Schuurman Volker. And by 1936 Volker was indeed living in Tjoemboeloeit.

Volker, J.S.	Aannemer	Tjoemboeloeit
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The Neervoorts were still in Bandoeng

But the telephone directory noted for Bart Neervoort at Tjoemboeloeit 'factory'.

Neervoort, B. Th.	Employé Volker Aanneming Maatschappij, huis	Rembrandtstraat 24
	fabriek	Tjoemboeloeit

At that time Bandoeng was where it was all happening – the ‘Paris of the East’. A magnificent Art Deco building, Villa Isola ( now called Isola Bumi Siliwang ) was ready in six months’ time, completed in 1933, for the enormous sum of (then) half a million Dutch-Indies guilders. The owner, a media tycoon, was a bit shocked by the soaring costs.





Bart was advised to look for a more modest design.

Indeed he did not go along with the Dutch architects making a name for themselves in Bandung. Bart's artistic talent together with Arie Poldervaart's technical knowledge and the financial support of Volker was enough to create a building which could compete in beauty and modern style with many buildings arising in Bandung in the thirties.

The millionaire did not get to enjoying his 'palace' because he died in the crash of the KLM aircraft de Uiver in 1934, in the Syrian desert. This airplane had been made much of; it had won a prize in the London Melbourne race, but only after making an emergency landing in what turned out to be a malaria-infested swamp. Having to be pulled out of that pit did not teach the KLM and its passengers a lesson in humility. Probably Melie took these incidents as an illustration of the Biblical saying: Pride comes before the fall.







## The bathroom.

The house Bart had built for himself was called Berg en Dal. It is a Christian name, signifying how life is full of ups and downs, mountains to climb and deep dales to accept and struggle out of. The name recalls the family name, 'Neer' meaning going down, but 'Voort' signifying 'onwards,' if

not upwards.

Berg en Dal attracted international interest until it was demolished early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It was recognised as an architectural feat, building on the optimistic, modernistic style 'Nieuwe Zakelijkheid,' but adapted to the tropical climate. It made use of state of the art technique and included some unique features, such as its black pillars. Of course the new material Ampasiet was used, for the villas as for smaller houses.



Bart was determined that the technical innovation of Arie and himself be a success. To demonstrate it Bart invited the government officials to a demonstration on the Kings square in Batavia. He had little huts built with this new material, 'ampasiet' and filled with very inflammable material, which he then lighted. The fire caused the fire brigade to come, but when the fire was out the ampasiet building elements turned out to be intact. In another demonstration Bart had small boxes made of Ampasiet, and filled with mineral water and ice cubes. The boxes were put into fires. When the fire died down the boxes were opened. The mineral water was still cool. The ice blocks had not melted. It was a success; in Batavia a street was even named Ampasiet Street.

### HET AMPASIT-BENTON. Demonstratie van onbrandbaarheid

Batavia 25 Jan, 1933 Hedenochtend onder leiding van den heer B. **NEERVOORT** een demonstratie gehouden om de onbrandbaarheid van het ampasit-beton aan te toonen. Daartoe heeft men op het Koningsplein achter de fontein een ruimte van 8 m' inhoud van dat beton opgesteld en met hout en ander brandbaar materiaal gevuld. Nadat een paar blikken petroleum over het hout waren gegoten werd het zaakje in brand gestoken. Bij de geslaagde, proeven in Bandoeng werd binnen in het blok een temperatuur bereikt van 1000gr. C. Heden werd de temperatuur niet opgemeten, doch ze zal hier wel niet lager geweest zijn. Nadat de brandweer het vuur gebluscht had, werd het blok stuk gehakt. De binnenzijde van het ampasitbeton – de wanden bestaan uit twee ampasit platen met een luchtruimte er tusschen – had bijna niets van het vuur geleden. Den buitenwand kon men met de hand aanraken, zonder die te branden! En nog frapperanter was, dat een kistje van dat beton, met ijs en aerblanda in het vuur gezet, geheel intact, met ijs en koud mineraal water uit het blok te 'voorschijn kwam ! In de maand Februari denkt de firma **VOLKER** hier ter stede met het bouwen van kleine woningen te beginnen.

The best proof was of course that Berg en Dal itself was made of Ampasiet.  
The black pillars a typical designers choice, were of marble.



This beautiful villa represented the high point of the Neervoort family, their climb from the orphanage in which they met to success and wealth in the Dutch East Indies. They had worked hard for it, and this was their reward. Bart was proud of his creation, and engaged a famous artist to paint four watercolours from four different angles, giving one to each of his children.

Of course a garden was added, an extra bit of ground bought to plant dahlias from Holland. In this climate there was not need to dig them up in autumn to keep them indoors through the winter. In Bandoeng there was no winter. Melie loved the flower garden. It can be glimpsed behind the house, and at the foot of the trees.



By now the boys were back from Holland, having finished their grammar school in Holland, in time for the housewarming party.

From left to right: Frits, father Bart, Amelia/Zus, Karel, Amelia/ Moes, Bart/Broer

Berg en Dal was the culmination of Bart's ambitions. He was no longer a newcomer as he was when he first arrived in Bandoeng. He was a well-known, successful businessman, in high spirits, the soul of the party. He had a beautiful avant-garde house in magnificent surroundings. He was the entrepreneur with who all those wanting a villa in this beautiful area engaged. Himself the son of a servant and a household cleaner, he now had servants himself, baboes and djongos, who kept the house ship shape and served the guests. He had a ladylike and efficient head Baboe, who took a great deal of the management tasks out of Melie's hands. Here she is, just like Bart's mother decades earlier, photographed in her best Javanese costume, keeping quite still, in front of a romantic cardboard background. It shows how highly the Neervoorts respected her.

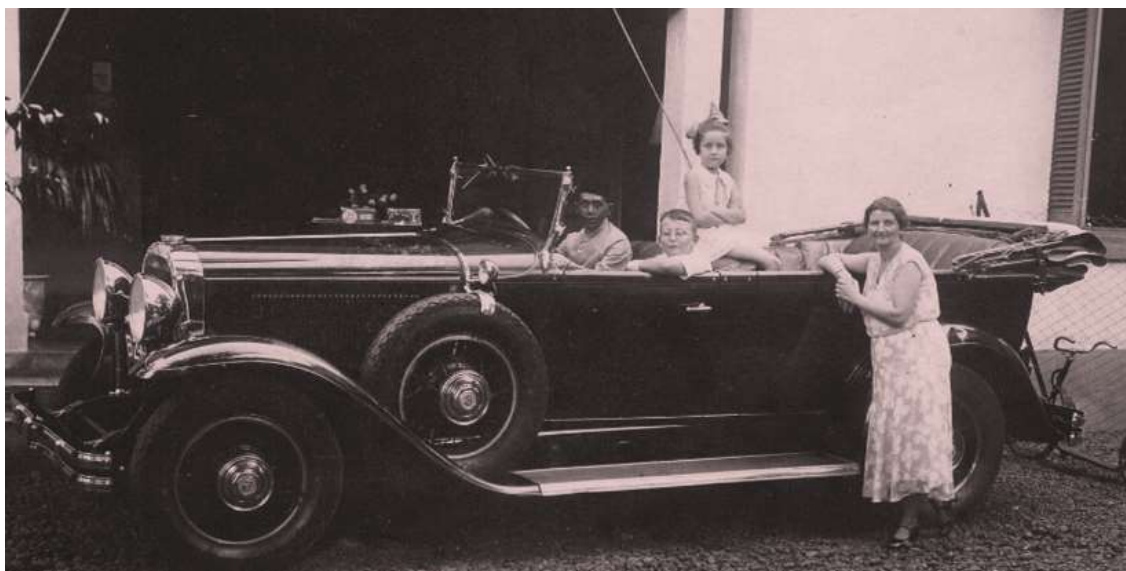


Bart's mother, Johanna Maria Lucas



Head Baboe of Berg en Dal

Bart also owned a succession of impressive cars in which he drove, or let himself be driven. The children were impressed by his Essex. The children went by bike of course.





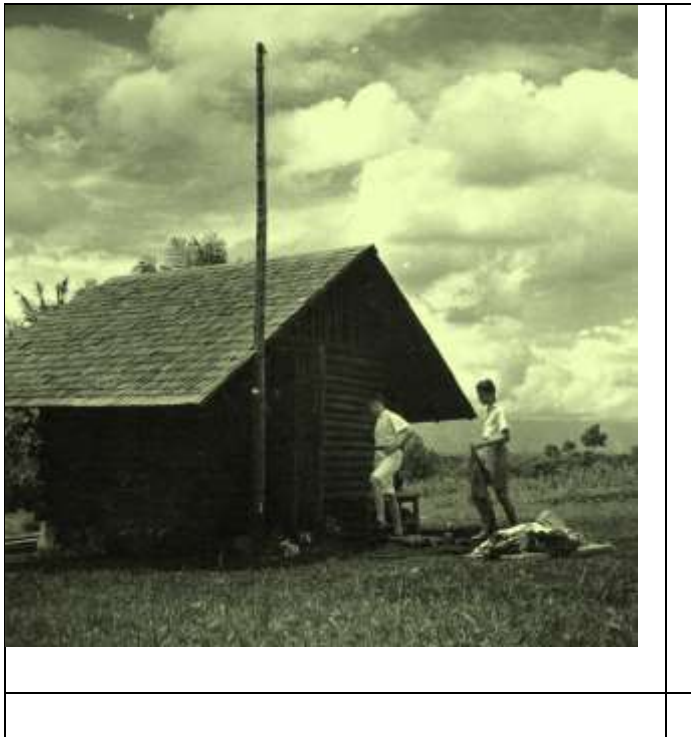
After their years in Holland, Karel and Frits had grown independent. They were given a big room together in Berg en Dal, as a bed-sitting-study room. There they invited their friends. Very different friends, for Frits and Karel were very different personalities. Yet all went smoothly. The boys accepted each other's differences, admired each other for the strong points and forgave each other the weak ones. Karel and Frits were finishing secondary education at the Bandoeng Christian Lyceum. Frits loved it there. He remained a member of the old boys and girls society until he died. School days for him were linked to a girl called Selma. Frits did well at school but Karel feared the worst. On the day the results of the final school exams were made public Karel didn't dare go to school, fearing failure. Frits came back all smiles. Karel had passed as well!



Then Frits and Karel registered at the Bandung Technical High School. The choice of subjects was rather limited, but included the study of infrastructure and dredging 'Weg-en Waterbouw', civil engineering and that was what Father Bart needed for his business. To tell the truth, Bart was enamoured by architecture and house construction, his original training. The dredging business he was hoping to leave in future to his sons.

De acht kooien, a cabin  
built for the boys  
up the mountain

design Frits Neervoort





Bandoeng Technical High School designed by Henri Maclaine Pont in 1919

The Bandoeng Technical High School, built in 1920, was another example of original Bandoeng architecture, combining modern building technology with traditional motifs from the Sumatran Minangkabau building style. Karel and Frits spent two years there.

The great advantage of the Bandoeng TH was that the boys could have digs at home. As it was said, Karel and Frits had a combined bedsitter in Berg en Dal. Father Bart understood that such young lads needed to really get away from home from time to time. The refinement of Berg and Dal was perhaps lost on the boys. So Bart had a hut built in the nearby mountains. It was designed by Frits his first project. The boys called it called 'de acht kooien' because it slept eight. Here they could have friends to stay. Perhaps a way for Bart to give the boys free rein, whilst nevertheless keeping an eye on them from a distance.

After their first two years, the boys continued their studies in Delft. Once again they undertook the trip to Holland, but this time just the two of them. This however was an extended cultural voyage, taking the young men from Indië, via Singapore, to Florence, Venice and Paris.

“Can you imagine how it must have been for us ‘orang-oetangs’ to get acquainted with European culture?”

Frits, Memories of Karel, July 1994

Florentine porcelain figurine, artist unclear, 1938?

European culture was experienced differently by the two boys. Karel enjoyed going out. Frits spent all his money in Florence, their first stop on a romantic porcelain group of the prince awakening sleeping beauty.

Karel and Frits joined the Delft Students Club, called Phoenix, the bird rising up out of his ashes, an appropriate name for Neervoorts. There Karel overcame the shyness he had because of his stutter, not being able to begin a sentence without first saying ‘A’.

He gave the obligatory novice speech, beginning by introducing himself as ‘A-Karel.’ He was a great success.

Everyone called him *A-Karel*, and they called Frits *A-Karel’s brother*. They joined in typical student activities. Frits rowed for the Delft students rowing club LAGA in the famous student rowing competition Varsity. Karel and Frits lived on the Oude Delft, renting from a landlady called Miss Mastenbroek, from 1938 until 1943. They studied together, which was a help for Karel as Frits was the ‘brain box.’

When Karel and Frits had just arrived in Europe, and were enjoying their cultural tour ending in Paris, something unexpected happened. In retrospect it turned out to be a stroke of luck for Bart, albeit one rising out of misfortune. On the 9<sup>th</sup> March 1938 Bart’s boss, the director of the Indië branch of VAM, died of a heart attack in a hotel in Palembang. He was only 61 years old. He was buried in Batava, under great amid



great interest. Five cars were needed to carry the flowers. Volker was loved by his employees. Bart held the funeral address.

The company was in confusion. Of course Jan Schuurman's successor must be a Volker – it was, after all, a family business. And he had a son, also named Jan Schuurman Volker, who was 30 years old. Of course Bart did not relish the idea of working under a young and unexperienced director. Bart and Melie flew to Holland to discuss the situation with the Dutch board of directors. I say flew with some emphasis. This was the first ever flight the couple made, only 4 years after the fatal crash of the KLM plane the Uiver. Melie explains how excited she was in a letter to her sister Mien in the USA, written in Rangoon, 29 July 1938.



*Dear Mien,*

“You will be surprised to get a letter from me, from Rangoon. Yes Mien, it is so unreal, but Bart and I are on our way from Bandoeng to Amsterdam, by airplane, and we are spending the night in Rangoon. The first night we spent in Medan with André. The reason is that Bart has to be in Holland for the rounding out of business resulting from the death of Mr Volker and he can't really be absent from the business in Indië for so long, so I went with him. What do you think of that? We will stay in Holland for three weeks and then fly back. It is just like a fairy tale and I would have liked to have seen the faces of Karel and Frits when they read my letter. I'm sure Tante Keetje (sister of Karel Thierrij, already deceased ed.), and Zus (Melie's sister, married to Dekker) will surely like this as well. We stopped over one flight in Palembang, and when we left we received your letter which had been sent on from Bandoeng. So now we have the little photo of Puck (Mien's daughter) and Rowly as bride and groom. You have become slim, Mien. I was extremely pleased with your letter and hope you received the parcels I sent.

Recently I received a letter from Fie, (their sister), but very confused, she had addressed it to the Kingdom of the Netherlands (instead of the The Dutch East Indies) but it arrived nevertheless. But now she has sent a postcard to Broer for his birthday, all very normal. Poor thing, she suffers but there is really nothing we can do for her. I sometimes write to Dr de Blinde, and get only a very short answer that it is still the same. I make sure the head nurse has money to buy Fie whatever she fancies.

You would love to know where Broer and Zus are now. Well they stayed at home and a good friend of mine has come to live in with them. Thus everything can be as usual, 20<sup>th</sup> August their school starts. They accompanied us to Batavia, and returned to Bandoeng by train. Already in Palembang I received a first pleasant letter from Zus, I mean our daughter Zus, not our sister Zus. I have promised to write to them every day, that is during the journey, once in Holland I will write twice a week.

We just spoke to a pilot who had come from Holland. He warned us that we could expect a VERY warm night in Bashra (southern Iraq). Oh well, that we will survive.

We are a day further, we flew from Jodhpur to Karachi. I have just opened a long letter from Broer and Zus. There is nothing to see when we are flying so high. Then one passes the time by writing, reading and sleeping, with now and then a drink and a bite to eat. Jodhpur (North West India is a town not visited by many tourists, but that will change in this time of airflights. Now there is still such a pure Eastern atmosphere there. All the Bible stories come to life there, and that's why it made such a wonderful impression on me. For instance a well with some white oxen standing by, people in bright Eastern clothes, coming closer, with water pitchers on their heads to fetch water. Here the camel is the beast of burden. The white oxen wander around freely,



settling themselves to sleep at night. These animals are holy here, one is not allowed to slaughter them.

We visited the palace of the Maharajah, next to the fort into which he could retreat with all his wives in times of war. The palace hall had a marble platform on which the women danced to please the monarch.

His throne, on which he sat watching the dancing, was also made of marble, but chiseled to look like lace. There was even a special Hindu temple for those wives and a bathing place.

The rooms are curious, no windowpanes but stone chiseled again like lace and plaiting, with here and there little red and blue bits of glass so that a wonderful light shines through. I had never thought I would see something so beautiful in my life. I stood on top of the platform and looked out on the city, from which a swelling and declining sound came. Then I experienced so many Biblical stories from the Old and New Testament. I who prefer staying in one place, I never imagined I would be so emotionally touched.

“That’s all for now Mien, the plane is descending, we are landing in Karachi where we can have a bite to eat....

After Jodhpur we landed in Bashara (Iraq) and it was indeed terribly hot there, the bed, the chair, everything was hot and the night was far from agreeable. We had breakfast at 3 in the morning and at 4 o’clock the plane started. We stopped shortly in Baghdad. We flew over Jerusalem and landed in Lydia, Gaza, and in the afternoon we arrived in Athens.





There we visited the Acropolis and the Jupiter Temple and the stadium. It all just like a fairytale. We were lucky, for it was a national holiday and the men and women girls had come to Athens in their national dress. When we came to the stadium they were dancing and singing national folk songs. The acropolis is something to dream about and the view from there on Athens is ravishing. As soon as we got to the Acropolis there, a real Roman came stepping solemnly down the steps in towards us, like a ghost from far off times. He wore a white mantel and blue sash draped gracefully over his shoulder, it seemed we were dreaming. It turned out to be a trick to get us to be photographed with him and of course we wanted to. I am including a photo. “Then the yearned-for moment came that we flew over Holland. The Zuiderzee, Naarden, Hilversum – we saw it all from the sky. I could not believe that within a quarter of an hour we would be in Schiphol but we were. Zus and Jan were standing there, it was lovely to see them again. They both looked well. We all went to hotel Wittenburg, and as we were drinking a cup of tea, in came Karel and Frits, straight from Paris. When Bart and Karel and Frits wanted to freshen up, (or have a drink together?) I went with Jan and Zus to Tante Keetje (sister of the girls’ foster father Karel Thierrij.) I had brought orchids from Indië. Well Mien you can imagine how pleased she was. It takes some adaptation, after such an eventful journey to the world of Keetje, who worries about someone not catching the right bus. But then her world is understandably small.

So now I am finishing my letter sitting in hotel Wittenburg in Scheveningen. Heartfelt greetings from Bart, Karel and Frits, also for Puck and a firm hug from your loving sister – *Melie.* “



The result of the talks for which Bart had come to Holland was unexpected. He was nominated VAM director for Indonesia, in succession to Jan Schuurman Volker. This meant that in future the family could stay in their elegant and comfortable house in Bandoeng and Bart could make short trips from there to outlying areas to supervise works and negotiate new contracts. Palembang, Balikpapan, Batavia, Makassar, Bart was often on his way, leaving Moes to see about the household. All seemed set for a promising future.

Upon returning to Bandoeng, Moes of course kept up kept up the communication, writing to Karel and Frits once a week. Her letters show the concerns of ordinary people. Zus will be given extra lessons, she is getting bad marks for French and German, and at the Girls School (MMS – Middelbare Meisjes School) the girls have to get sufficient marks in all languages. Moes has trouble with her rheumatoid arthritis; the hot radiation doesn't seem to help. Mrs. Volker, the widow of Bart's former boss came for Christmas, what a nonstop chatterbox she is. Moes is dying to know how her boys spent Christmas. She hopes they are warm enough and wonders how they are doing on the ice, skating. (Frits never took to skating in spite of his mother's encouragement). Have they recently visited tante Fie?

Papa writes as well. They had a good Christmas, Moes was busy making all sorts of goodies in spite of her pain. He has to admit Broer and Zus helped her. Papa always puts in a bit of business talk. He has telephoned to Volker in Holland to buy the hopperzuiger, (hopper dredger which can suck and store mud and bring it elsewhere). The government has given its okay. His former director J.S.Volker would have been very pleased. He had always wanted a hopper zuiger. The boys should ask to go and see it, perhaps they will be allowed on board and can represent their 'old man' when it departs to Indië. This ship used to belong to L. Volker, one of the rich Volkers who participated in digging the Suez canal.

The year 1938 has been exceptionally fruitful. Bart, who only had a meager training has now been able to place two sons in Delft. They are to become civilo engineers at their father's expense. He had a magnificent family home built in the best area of Bandoeng. And what's more, the family is living in loving harmony even over great distances.

Moes keeps up the weekly communication. Papa is often away on business, to Palembang, or Balikpapan, or Makassar, but if he is home, Moes hands over the letter she has written to her boys, and puts the pen in his hand. What can he tell the boys, Moes has already given them all the gossip.

She wispers something in his ear, and yes this is what he writes on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1938:

“Well this makes me uncomfortable for it is unwelcome news about my namesake (Broer who's official name is also Bart Neervoort.)  
Your brother,



the only male support I have left in this household at Berg en Dal, has been put to shame at the Lyceum (grammar school) in front of all the teachers and about 600-700 pupils. He was put into the sack by Black Peter! By now it seems to be something of a tradition that a Neervoort is put to shame in front of the crowd! The curious thing is that the victims don't seem to mind at all."

Dear boys we wish you the very best. *Papa*

Bandoeng, 30<sup>th</sup> December, 1938

"1938 has brought us great changes, many days of hapinness, and conditions which continually make us think, how near God has been to us. We have not had any serious illness, we have lived a year now in this beautiful house, and the great difficulties I expected when Mr Volker died have not only been overcome, but have lifted me into a position and have created circumstances which I could not have dreamt of. The thought is always with us that God is good to us. Convinced of his love and mercy we now greet the year 1939."

*Papa*



December 1938

Berg en Dal, 26<sup>th</sup>

“Dear Karel and Frits,  
The very best wishes for you. Also from Boer and Zus.

That God grant us Peace....

A big hug from your mother and thank you for all your telegrams.”

Berg en Dal, 30<sup>th</sup> December 1938

“We all of us enter the new year, hoping and trusting that we shall be spared a war.”

*Papa*

ng an the friend there said, you had better come to Makassar as quickly as possible, indeed Anna has delivered a baby boy.

Father was a bit frustrated. He didn't know whether to laugh or cry. So the caretaker was not mad. He had spoken the truth, an heir had been born.

“Father ran home and changed clothes, hastily packed his suitcase, even thought of taking some work with him to do in those hours that he was not allowed to be with mother, and wanted to leave immediately. That turned out to be impossible. The whole staff of the house and the office, so many many people and their wives had gathered like a crowd on the front gallery.

“They all absolutely needed to congratulate us, everybody was happy for and with us, especially as the baby was a ‘orang poetera’ a prince, that was especially magnificent. Of course I thanked everyone heartily and wanted to leave, but then the cook started crying her eyes out. How could the Tuan go to see the baby without her?”

“So she had to put on a fine silk sarong, and dress her little son in a neat suit, she searched for a little carved wooden box as an offering ... at last all was packed into the car and off he went.... Travelling at 70 km an hour to Makassar, which wasn't that difficult for father had seen to it that the road was in good repair, which was easy as cousin Bart Neervoort had constructed an excellent road when he was in Makassar.

In October 1940, Moes writes to Karel and Frits:

“Vonnie Spoor is living with us now and she would love to know how André is getting along.” Her brother André was in Holland for schooling. Hers was a special anxiety, because by that time the Nazis had captured the so far neutral Kingdom of the Netherlands.







## Nazis in the Netherlands

Europe was the first to be struck by war. On September 30, 1938, when the British Prime Minister Chamberlain met Hitler in Munich after the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia, it had seemed that war had been avoided. The Neervoorts in Bandoeng did not quite trust the situation, but they did trust that God would bring peace. On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. Britain and France declared war on Germany on September 3. The Netherlands remained neutral. On the 4<sup>th</sup> September Moes writes to her two sons so far away in Europe.

“Dear Boys,

“Luckily your letters arrived today. The situation has completely changed and who knows what will have happened by the time you receive this letter. We have no idea when you will get this letter, for we don’t know if the communication with Holland will be possible in this new situation, and if indeed we, the Netherlands will stay free of this terrible war. I don’t have to write how terrible everything is, you know as well as I do. I feel the loss of everything; I mean everything that used to be important to me has lost its value. Our magnificent house, our beautiful garden with all those flowers. I sometimes look at them and think, this does not belong to us.”

The parental feelings about their boys fighting for their country were ambivalent. The Netherlands had scarcely a standing army at the time, it worked with conscripts, who had only several months of training. They were called up per year of birth. If there was only one son at the draft age, he would not be called up. If there were two boys as in our case, only one would be drafted. Obviously Karel and Frits had decided it should be Frits, as he was further progressed with his studies. Of course a second son could volunteer.

“Frits we now know that you belong to the August 1940 draft. Karel, don’t volunteer! They will call you up if they need you. That is what people here say who experienced the previous draft (in 1914 when Holland managed to stay neutral.)

If the war comes to us of course you should volunteer.’ (which they did see later)  
“Papa has telegraphed money to you for a whole year. All, this reminds us of 1914, the cruelty. You were probably in Hazerswoude yesterday (visiting Melie’s sister, Zus Dekker and family). I am so glad you can go there.

“My dear Karel, dear Frits may God grant us that we stay out of this and that it will soon end. Dag Karel, Dag Frits, (‘Dag’ can mean good day and goodbye.) A loving caress from your mother, and hearty greetings from Broer.”

Bart and Melie write often to their sons in this period. On 8<sup>th</sup> September, Moes writes:

“Papa has remained at home all these days, but now he is off to Balikpapan. It is business as usual, but what the future will bring, nobody knows. I am very busy, for it just won’t work out with a cookie (cook). Then one applies but doesn’t turn up, or stays only for one day. Thank goodness I am not afraid of using my hands myself.”

In the course of the month, anxiety seems to have died down, and made place for daily concerns. On 18<sup>th</sup> September Melie writes:

“Frits, we haven’t heard that the 1940 draft has been called up. Hopefully you can enroll for the Technical Hogeschool (University Delft) and belong to the happy few who can follow the courses this year. I am glad you have started rowing again. I can understand that you can suddenly be overcome by the feeling of being extremely privileged, and you are, but moping about that, Frits, isn’t helping anyone. We often have the same feeling. We are privileged. Let us thank God for that. And if trouble comes our way, we will feel strong, remembering all the good things we have received.

We want to ask you, have you been to see Tante Fie lately, and if not, please do so. I have sent money and messages, but don’t hear anything.”

Bandoeng, 3<sup>rd</sup> September

1939

“Tante Fie has written to us with great urgency. She wants us to send you back to Indië for you came to Holland to study, not to fight. What do you think of that? She also asks for some sweets from Indië, but I can’t send those at the moment.”

In 1940 the menace of war comes closer. On 6<sup>th</sup> March Moes writes:

“On Saturday afternoon we had alarm. On Monday we had a blackout. It was weird not to see those lights twinkling in Bandoeng. We had sealed the doors of the dining room with black cloth. We played a game of monopoly. Many people went to bed early. For the native Indonesians it was very difficult we had to tell them several times that it was only *tjoba tjoba*, an exercise and not the real thing.”

There are plans to send 19-year-old Broer to America for further education, for a period of 3-4 years. There he will get practical experience and an advantage over others, and can be employed in the business in one of the outlying areas. As storm clouds gather there is a long letter for Frits' 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. He was born on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1918; the start of negotiations between de German and Allied forces which led to the end of the First World War.

The letter to Frits, a serious slightly melancholy young man, for his coming of age, his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday has a serious tone.

Bandoeng 25<sup>th</sup> October 1939

"Dear Frits,

"May God's blessing lie on you and the years ahead.....In these times I am compelled lately to think of the months before you were born. It was in the World War and Communism was gaining ground and was welcomed everywhere – you can understand that, for the World War had been going on for 3 ½ years. It was much more intense than the fighting nowadays and I often had to think of the Bible text: 'Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days'" (Luke 21:23.)

O how often I made myself anxious in those days."

"And then on your birth day, a ceasefire was negotiated, and in the clinic where you were born you were called: 'little peace angel.' Can you understand, Frits, that those days often come back in my memory? I sincerely hope you can get your candidate's exam, but if it becomes impossible because you are called up for military service, so be it."



*An extra birthday hug from your mother.*

Papa writes his usual note at the end of her letter. Broer and Zus also write to congratulate their brother with his coming of age. Their letters are those of young people with no real care in the world.

Below is teenage Zus, 4<sup>th</sup> from left, with her girlfriends, Vonnie Spoor included of course. 3<sup>rd</sup> from right.



Then what Melie had feared happens. On 10<sup>th</sup> May 1940, the Netherlands is invaded by Nazi Germany. On 15<sup>th</sup> May 1940, one day after the bombing of Rotterdam, the Dutch forces surrendered.



There was not much of a fight. There wasn't even time to call up the draft Frits belonged to.

Communications with Indië came to a halting standstill. In the collection of my cousin Sonja, there are no letters for 1940 in May, June, July, August, September, November, December etc. on to 1945. The only possibility was to communicate via the United States of America, still neutral at that time. Luckily the Neervoorts had family in America. Melie had her sister Tante Mien, married to Krijn Niemantsverdriet, in America (shortened into Niemant). Karel and Frits could communicate via their brother Broer who had just arrived in the States. Although Broer was not a great writer – nothing compared to his mother with her extensive weekly epistles.

Sometimes a letter gets through between occupied Delft to Bandoeng via personal courier. On 22 September 1940, Bart and Melie celebrate their 25<sup>th</sup>, silver wedding anniversary. There are letters and a glass vase with silver pedestal from Karel and Frits, brought by another Dutch family.

Bandoeng 7<sup>th</sup> Oct 1940

"You can't imagine how happy we were to receive your letters. Of course with all the memories of that day I was in tears and more than even our thoughts were with you in those days. Broer wrote:

'On Sundays I always feel close to you because I know that on that day you think a great deal about me. Shall we all agree to that, to think about each other especially on Sunday?

"Zus is getting good marks and Vonnie Spoor is living with us now. She is eager to hear how André is getting on. (Her brother was equally inaccessible, living with Oom Jan in Holland.)

"Dear boys a kiss from us and from Zus, and happy birthday Frits."

"As usual your mother leaves a bit of space for me to write, and this time I will use it to praise your mother who is courageous in all circumstances and always when necessary compassionate with others through her love and strength."

*Dag Karel, dag Frits, your father.*

At the beginning of 1941 a letter arrives from their parents sent via Mien in the US. The letter is pale, to evade the censor, with only gossip and personal emotion, with comments on the political situation expressed in Biblical terms.



From Bandoeng, to Oude delft, via Summit New  
Jersey, USA

“Dear Karel and Frits,

“At the start of this New Year we want to cry out to you the word of our Saviour.

‘Take courage I have overcome the world.’ And let us not forget his word, ‘My Kingdom is not of this world.’

We think of you often, every evening when we fold our hands in prayer. Please give our best wishes to Tante Keetje (sister of Melie’s foster father) and to all in Hazerswoude (Zus Dekker and family).

“We sincerely hope that this letter reaches you in good health. We trust that God who governs us is also caring for you.”

*A kiss from your loving mother.*





There are a few more letters via Tante Mien in Summit. In April 1941 Moes reports that there is a greater demand for ships to the US, because so many ships of other countries are either fallen into enemy hands or in use for troop transport. In Indië there is a chase on to find so-called internal enemies, supporters of Hitler and in general foreigners. And there is a campaign to set Japan against the US. The "Governor General urges us to keep calm." In August, Moes can still project her motherly concerns; they have received photos from Frits and Karel. "Karel looks well; he is obviously thriving on that rather meager diet. Frits if you are ever again under my motherly care, I will make sure that your suit doesn't hang on you anymore." She asks have they visited André in Naarden, where he is staying with the vicar of Naarden church, Oom Jan Poldervaart.

The last letter is from Tante Mien, from Summit, October 1941. She writes knowing that Karel and Frits are not getting any more post from home. In December 1941, when after Pearl Harbor, the US and Indië join the war and Indië is occupied by the Japanese, communication between the family members will grind to a halt.



Of course everyone was relieved when Eindhoven was liberated ahead of the west of the country, on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1944 as part of Operation Market Garden.

By now Karel was also free. He came out of hiding on 18<sup>th</sup> September. So Karel could represent all the Neervoorts at the wedding of Frits



Neervoort and Ursel Geiss on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1944.

From left to right:

Willi Geiss, Karel Ursel Geiss, Frits, Else Geiss

Frits' parents and Zus were of course not aware of this festive day, being in a Japanese camp, and lacking all means of communication with the outside world. .

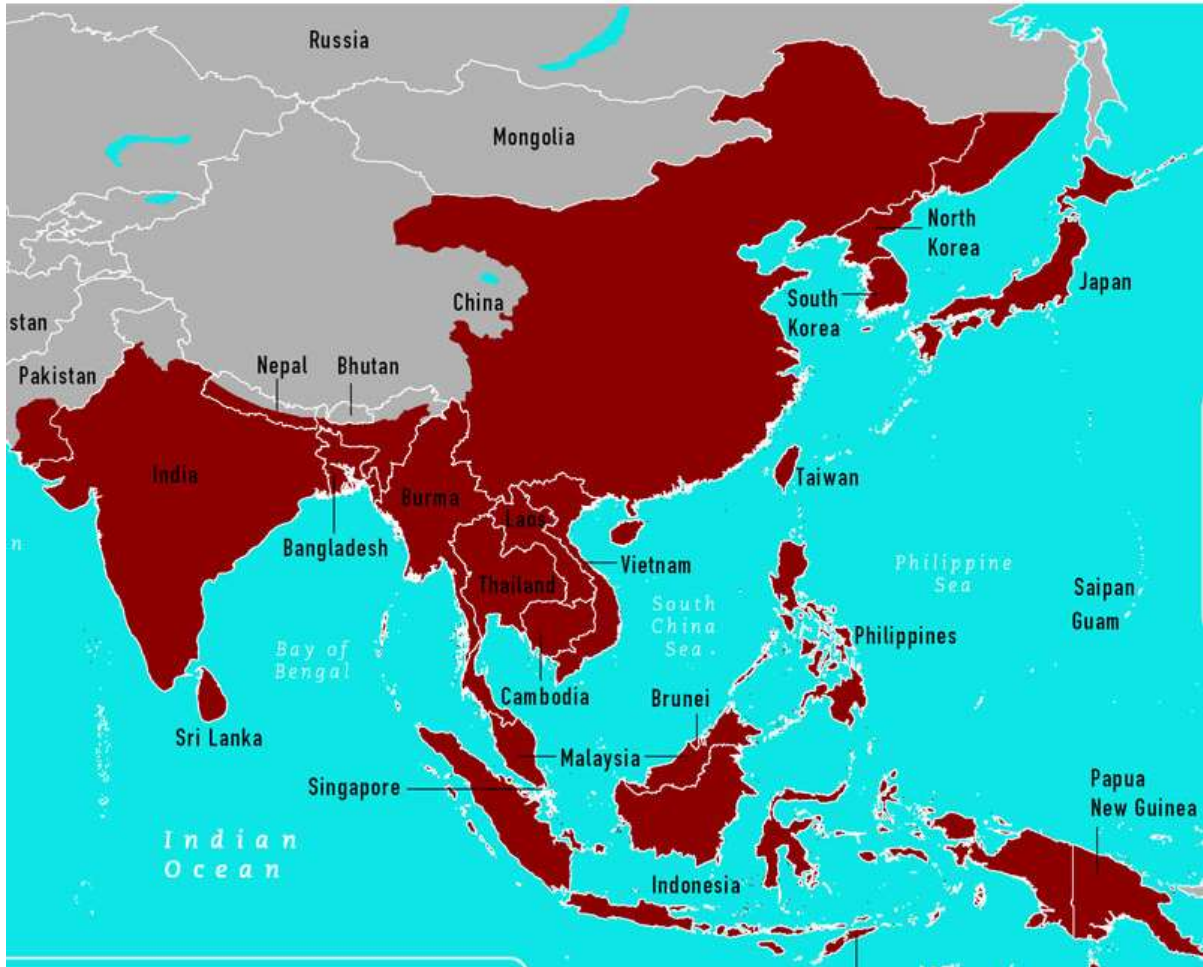
The bride's dress was homemade from an old curtain, the only material available.

History relates how the Operation Market Garden ran into trouble at Arnhem. Many parachutists, who had optimistically landed on the other side of the Rhine, were slaughtered.

Arnhem was a bridge too far.

The central and Northern part of the Netherlands remained under Nazi control





Indië under Japanese occupation

In all these war years Karel and Frits and André had only the vaguest idea of what their parents and sisters were going through. Of course the main historical facts were known, via Radio Oranje. On 7<sup>th</sup> December 1941, Japan attacked the US Navy in Pearl Harbor, the US base in Hawaii. Nearly two and a half thousand Americans were killed. The USA declared war on Japan and Germany. The Dutch East Indies also declared war on Japan.

At first the Dutch in Indië did not notice much difference. Japan obviously thought the Dutch would come round and see that their future lay with Japan or at least in continued neutrality. The Dutch Royal Indië Army, the KNIL was trained and equipped to keep the peace inside the archipelago, not to defend it against external threats. Preparations were made, but they were not entirely convincing.

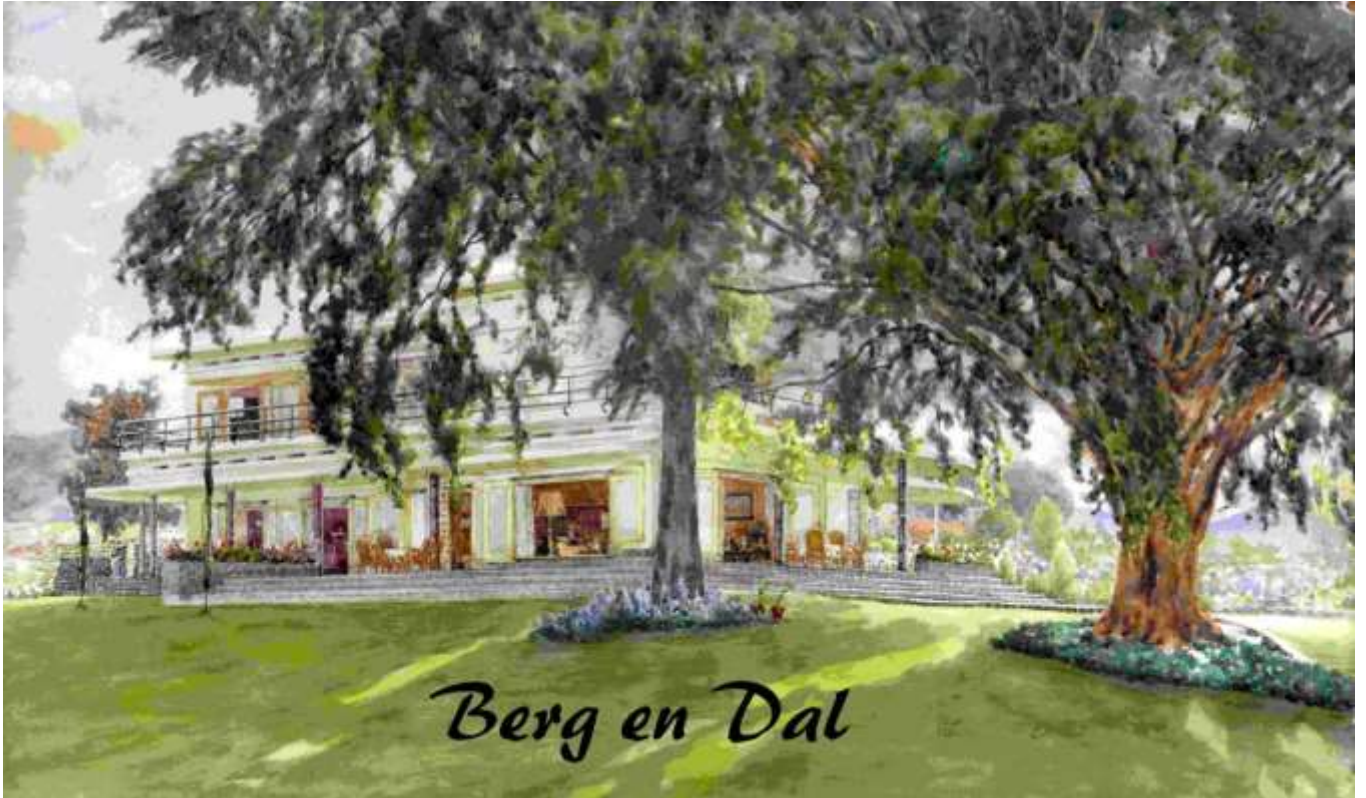
Thus towns, plantations and factories were called upon to organize their own defense, with uniforms being delivered for militia, which mainly consisted of native

Indonesians. Often they preferred to avoid any conflict, folded their uniforms and lay them by a tree and fled. The Dutch militia commanders had little or no practice in handling weapons. The general feeling was that Japan did not pose a realistic threat to Indië; they were depicted by Bart Neervoort as “little bandy-legged men on bikes.” Some Dutch held that the Japs couldn’t hit a target, their sight being inferior due to their narrow split eyes. Thus the Dutch had a systematic underestimation of the Japanese potential.



If there were a threat, Indië could count on the protection of the British armed forces.

This was typical of the overestimation by the Dutch of their own ability to stay out of the fight and of the capacity and willingness of the British to protect them.



Bandoeng was indeed the last Dutch stronghold. It was far from the coast, in the mountains. It was to Bandoeng that the Governor General retreated, and with him the KNIL high military command. With Batavia taken, Bandoeng was in fact the capital of Indië. However it soon became clear that the town could not be held. It was surrendered on 5th March 1942.

The treatment in this prison was relatively mild, but the inmates were hostages, to be killed if and when high level Japanese were killed. Fortunately Bart belonged to that small number of men the Japanese considered necessary for their own use. Obviously infrastructure and buildings had been destroyed during their attack, and his company VAM was needed to repair and rebuild them. Like other men who were spared, Bart had to wear a white band with a red sun on it, the same symbol that appeared on the Japanese flag. Often these 'useful' men were interned only in 1944.

In the beginning of November 1942, the Japanese started to group Dutch women and children into certain "protected" areas. Anna, Melie and their daughters were taken to the Tjihapit camp. Basically it was an area of Bandoeng fenced in with barbed wire. The little houses were overcrowded; the sanitary conditions were terrible; water and food were scarce. What was particularly hard for Melie, with her arthritis, was the roll call, standing endlessly in the glaring sun and even having to bow for the Japanese camp commander. Anna was block elder and she often protested and to the Japanese commander, to no avail. The women and their children were just numbers.



Neervoort, A.J.	39	F	17039	6-5-1925
Neervoort-Schlahmilch, A.J.	39	F	17040	29-10-1892



Spoor, Y.L.	15	F	14079	21-7-1927
Spoor-Poldervaart, A.M.	15	F	14078	25-10-1897

Melie writes to Mien on 25th December 1945, looking back at the years in the Japanese camps

“Zus and I were in a camp in Bandung until May 1945. (Tjihapit) There life was made more and more difficult and then we had to move, we were put on transport in closed vans.

Then to a camp outside Batavia, camp Makassar. A symphony of red earth, bamboo and banana trees.”



This camp existed of barracks made of bamboo and palm leaves for a roof, enclosed by barbed wire and plaited bamboo walls. The only thing each person had was a thin matrass of 60 cm wide.

It was a working camp, meant to provide vegetables and pork for several other camps, and was called ‘Makassar Farm.’






“Zus acted as koelie (coolie or laborer) in the vegetable garden. “We each had 60 cm space with little mattresses to sleep on, and [space to] wash ourselves if ill. This was our home. I soon became ill, was taken to the sick barracks at the camp, then to an emergency hospital where I lay for a month. When I came back everyone said I was thinner, but my intestines behaved. I was so happy to be back for Zus had been very lonely in that full barracks. Unfortunately after a month, it was wrong again, I lay on my 60 cm space. Zus was wonderful.” Vonnie was and still is wonderful. She doesn’t

remember the camps with bitterness. She still talks about the Dutch comedian Corrie Vonk, who performed for the internees of the Tjihapit camp. She and her husband Wim Kan were interned in Bandoeng when they were on tour in Indië.

In May 1945 the two friends, Melie and Anna were parted. The Neervoorts were transported as said to Makassar camp. Ironic given the first meeting of the families in Makassar on the island of Celebes. The word now gained another meaning.

The Spoor's were taken in closed vans to several places, including Kramat, where they were with Simon Spoor's wife Rika Kroeze. They knew her well from the time she stayed with them in Medan when her husband was having an affair with another woman.

1024	Spoor, A.M.	23529	F	48	met 1 fam.
1025	Spoor-Kroeze, R.C.	22816	F	39	

Anna and Vonnie ended up in the ADEK camp, previously the Algemeen Delisch Emigratie Kantoor, a camp for Javanese koelies on their way to work on the Deli tobacco plantations on Sumatra. Now it was a camp for Dutch woman and children. All the women and children were in the same hall. Only the priest, Vonnie remembers, was allowed a corner with a curtain. Perhaps, the women joked, he couldn't bear so much feminine beauty. There Annie became very ill. In the camp hospital patients hardly had anything to eat. Vonnie fed her mother large parts of her own meager portion. As a result her intestines practically refused to work at all. When Simon Spoor met them again after the Japanese capitulation in Batavia he was shocked.

"They were just skin covered bones, scaring to see." Perhaps he used his influence to get priority transport for his brother and family the back to Holland. They returned in November 1945.

## 8. Saving Indië

In all these war years Karel, Frits and André didn't know where their parents were and indeed if they were still alive. No wonder the boys wanted to get back to Indië as soon as possible, to help vanquish the Japs and liberate and care for their parents. Frits (left) and Karel (right) decided to volunteer for the KNIL straight after the liberation of Eindhoven.



Ursel wanted to come too. The commander warned that they would not see much of each other, Frits with his degree would be a lieutenant, Ursel only a sergeant, and they would have to obey orders even if it meant being kilometers apart. To make any claims at all the commander strongly advised the couple to get married before entering the army. That however meant that Ursel needed Frits to sign in



agreement that she join the KNIL. In those days marriage meant the husband was in charge of the wife. She lacked means to act independently from him in any legally binding questions. Another command given the newlyweds was: no pregnancies! Which in those days practically meant no sex or at least no relaxed sex.

It is said that most of the time spent by the military is in.... waiting. Frits, Karel and Ursel officially joined the KNIL on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1945 in London some six months after the liberation of Eindhoven. They committed themselves on a voluntary basis to serve both inside and outside the Netherlands for the duration of the war or so much longer as might prove necessary.

Both Karel and Frits joined the unit of military engineers, (Wapen der Genie), Frits as reserve 2e lieutenant; implying that they would not be engaged in combat. Ursel joined the Vrouwen Korps, (VK, and Women's Force).

For Karel the duration turned out to be until 15<sup>th</sup> July 1947, i.e. nearly two and a half years. Frits was given great extended leave in January 1947 so as to be able to help rebuild his father's company Volker. He still resorted under military command, meaning he was restricted in his movements and had to ask permission to leave Indi even for a short period. This lasted until 1950. Ursel who as a woman was not obliged to serve as the men were, was demobilized in May 1946. She did however have to get her husband's permission to join up. In those days man was still head of his wife. First, directly following their signing up in London, Ursel, Karel and Frits had to follow a training in Wolverhampton, UK for two and a half months. This turned out to be conveniently near the newly wed wife of Bart. Indeed Broer, the youngest, was the first to be married.

Left Frits, Peggy middle, Ursel right  
Small girl is Jill



As the only family member living in a free country he had suspended his training and joined the war effort as radio operator on a Dutch ship that had been requisitioned for Allied troop transport. As his ship was in a British harbor he met a Scottish widow, Peggie Macguffie. Peggie who had a little girl called Jill, had lost her husband, a postman, in a bombing. Bart and Peggie were married on 17th August 1944. Nobody in the family knew about this, communications were still severed. After years of broken communications it must have been wonderful for Karel, Frits and Ursel to meet Peggie, and shortly afterwards their Broer as well.



Left Frits and right Broer, both in uniform

Naples,<sup>1</sup> 26 February 1945  
Radio Operator Bart  
Neervoort

*Dear Frits and Ursula,*

“Today I received a letter from Peggy dated 19<sup>th</sup> February in which she wrote that she had received a letter from you and that Karel had visited her during the weekend. I still cannot believe that you are all healthy and well in England. The surprise that we are both married is therefore mutual! Congratulations!”

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<sup>1</sup> Between 27 and 30 September the people of the Italian city of Naples rose up against the German forces occupying it after the fall of Mussolini. The occupiers were forced out by the townsfolk and the Italian Resistance before the arrival of the first Allied forces in Naples on 1 October 1943. It was therefore for Allied ships a safe haven.

Bart was 17 years old when the war broke out, 22 when he married. Bart and Peggy were married in UK on 17. 08.1944, Frits and Ursel on 11 December 1944 in Eindhoven ed.

“I hope I will have the chance to meet you, but I don’t know for sure of course. I don’t know whether you will have met Peggy by the time this letter arrives, so let me introduce her. We were married last August. I had known her then for about two years. Perhaps I didn’t mention Jill so far. Jill is Peggy’s daughter from her first marriage. When you meet her I’m sure you will find her to be a lovely little girl. Then you will understand that it makes no difference for whether she is my own child or not. Neither do I mind at all that Peggy is older than I am.” (The age difference was about 10 years.)

I love her more than everyone else, but I suppose you know a happy marriage means.

I hope you will come to East Didbury often. My house is your house as long as you are in England. I am glad you have a military rank which will allow you to live a more or less comfortable life.

I really detested the one and a half years that I was in the army could not get a rank because my sight is not 100%. After that I became a gunner with the merchant navy. At least this was more interesting, although the surroundings were not cozy. Then I was declared unfit for service in New York because of my eyes. Then I followed training for 3 months for radio operator. (Dutch: marconist, dealing with sending and receiving Morse signs.) This job pleases me, although my pay is even less than a gunner’s. As so-called officer I am also supposed to look smart, but of that I don’t take much notice.

These experiences have made me somewhat bitter. Many would call me something like ‘red’. In spite of everything the Russians did for us, the word Red still has the same negative connotation as in Holland.”

(The war could probably not have been won without the Russians joining on the side of the Allies. the battle of Stalingrad was the turning point of the war with Hitler. Some 20 million citizens of the Soviet Union died.)

“I won’t be able to keep this job, because they gave me a special war certificate for it, which will probably not be worth much after the war when the supply of workers in the labor market will increase greatly. (Masses of military men serving overseas coming home.) I suppose my future will be in Indië. Recently I wrote to a business relation of Dad. I know him rather well and he is managing director of one of the rubber companies in America and I just asked him straight out if there could be a job for me with US Rubber on one of their plantations. I am anxiously awaiting his reply. I can’t afford to just wait and see what the future brings. Well I will stop talking about this subject. Time will tell what my future will be. I can only say that I would prefer a simple job with Peggy as my wife, than have a chance to carry on with studies in order to get a good job, but without her. In the meantime the main thing is that I come out of this war alive and kicking. Up to now I have been happy.”

(Radio operator on board a ship was dangerous because of Nazi torpedo’s against military and civilian craft. 30,248 merchant seamen lost their lives during World War Two, a death rate that was higher proportionately than in any of the armed forces.)

“Well dear Frits and Ursel, (I still have to get used to that name).”  
(Ursel Geiss was of course a German name ed.)

Good luck and I hope we will meet again soon.  
A stevige vijf - (strong manly handshake) from your

*Broer*



Frits to his parents, Madras, 1 October, 1945

“Broer, good old Bart, has grown into a man with a strong character, and he is married! The first of us three sons, with a Scottish lady called Peggie Macguffie her address is....He is at sea as a radio operator until 6 months after the peace. On SS Tjibajak. He has worked himself up magnificently from the rank of soldier, through his own exertion and perseverance. I and my wife Ursula were proud of him when we saw Broer. You will be even more proud when you see him. “

Zus, who had heard from Ursel that her brothers were all alive, in a letter to the parents of Ursula:

Batavia, 18

November 1945

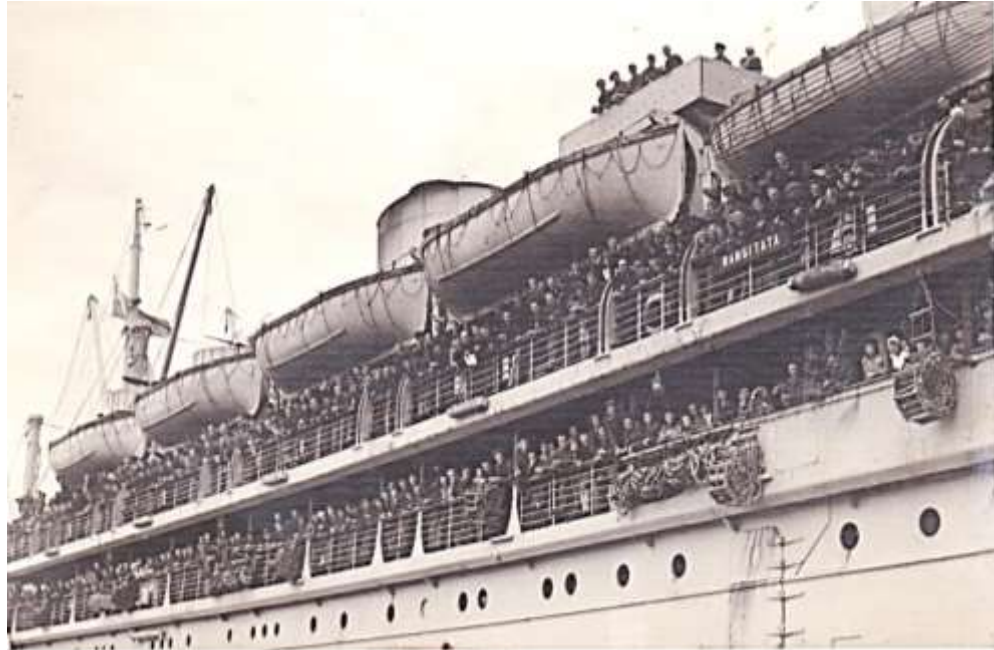
“We are still awaiting the arrival of Bart, who knows when his ship Tjibajak will enter the Priok harbor here.” (This ship was Dutch, serving between Holland and Indië, but after the Nazi occupation of Holland, sailing under British command with a crew of Dutch and Indonesians. With a capacity of 2300 military she was used for troop transports to the East, returning with refugees from the Japanese camps.)

So much for the news about Broer, received after so many years of silence.

Tjibajak , the ship of Broer



On the 8<sup>th</sup> May 1945, three days after the complete liberation of the Netherlands, Karel, Frits and Ursel sailed as KNIL military for Australia, where they were to undergo further training.



They arrived on the 19<sup>th</sup> June 1945, and were stationed in Casino near Brisbane. There Karel met Patricia Howard, an Australian nurse. She became his future wife.

In the meantime the international scene had changed radically. After the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki Japan capitulated on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1945.

The primary reason for Frits and Karel to join the KNIL had disappeared. However there was enough left to do. Not only in Indië also in other countries occupied by Japan had citizens been imprisoned in camps. All these people must be located, fed, given medical care and evacuated.

Karel was transferred to the Philippines, to Manilla.



“We get good news from Karel in Manilla.”

Melie to Mrs Geiss, October 1945

There he acted as pay master. The internees had hardly any belongings and no money. If they were to make their way in the world they must have some cash to start with. Karel made many people happy by giving them the allowance allotted by the relief organisation, without asking for signatures promising to pay it back.



On the 19<sup>th</sup> March 1946 Karel was sent to Balikpapan, to serve with the military engineer corps. This important oil center had been one of the first locations occupied by Japan. After heavy fighting it was liberated by the Australian army one or two months before the end of the war. It had suffered greatly from both Japanese and allied bombing. Hardly any buildings were left standing, not to speak of roads, bridges and harbor facilities. Karel must have been shocked at what he found in this city where his father's company had implemented so many construction projects. There was enough reconstruction to do.

### **Bersiap**

Back to the supposed end of the war in Indie.

As Melie commented in a letter to her sister:

*"Then came the capitulation of Japan, We can't use the word Peace because it was all out war."*

The capitulation of Japan had come as a total surprise. Hardly anyone knew about the existence and potential of the nuclear bomb, which had been developed under high secrecy in the so-called Manhattan project in the USA. As a result the Allied troops, organized as SEAC (South East Asia Command) were simply not ready to re-occupy the vast territories that Japan had occupied in East Asia. Indië was only one of them, added to the list of territories only on the day of Japanese surrender. An extra problem was that the responsibility for Indië was transferred at the last minute from the US to the British command. Thus Vice Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, ViceRoy of India was in charge and the British Indian troops were obliged to guarantee the peace in the Dutch colony.

The unexpected end to the war presented the SEAC Supreme Commander, Mountbatten, with a dilemma. At that time, after years of war, SEAC was poorly equipped to carry out its new responsibilities. In an area larger than Europe, an estimated 120,000 Allied prisoners of war and internees were desperate for help, and approximately 730,000 Japanese soldiers and civilians were waiting to be disarmed and repatriated. To carry out this mission, Mountbatten had just



350,000 men, 120 transport ships and 50 RAF squadrons at his disposal. SEAC faced more delay when on 19 August MacArthur ordered that no Allied forces would execute new landings or accept Japanese surrenders until the official surrender ceremony on 2 September 1945. Only on 28 September did the first British units land in Batavia.

So for several weeks there was simply no legitimate authority in place.

Two days after the capitulation of Japan the nationalist leader Soekarno had proclaimed the independence of Indonesia. Soekarno (1901-1970) was one of the few Indonesian students at the Bandoeng Technical High School where Frits and Karel had studied. Soekarno trained as an architect, and worked as such in Bandoeng. He must have found sympathy with the Neervoorts if only for this reason. Soekarno had been striving for independence for decades. In 1938 the Dutch colonial authorities exiled him to West-Sumatra.

Soekarno was liberated by the Japanese in 1942. At the end of the war he was working with the Japanese on the Indonesian independence. When Japan suddenly capitulated he was forced by young militant Indonesians to proclaim Indonesian Independence immediately, which he did on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1945. Elaborate documents had been prepared, coining the term 'Pancasila', as the basis of a secular state, which tolerated five different religions, Islam, Roman Catholicism Christianity (Protestants) Hindu and Buddhism. In order to forge a unity out of the very diverse peoples which had been gathered under Dutch colonial rule he introduced Bahasa Indonesia as official language, a rather simple version of Malayan, instead of the Javanese language. However the Independence was so rushed that the new Republic did not have the means to guarantee law and order.

What made it even more difficult was that the Dutch authorities showed no sign of recognizing the New Republic.

On the contrary, Soekarno was seen as an enemy and his version of independence as very misguided. One might see this as contrary to a speech held by Queen Wilhelmina on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1942, in which independence was held out as a promise for the Indonesians. This speech, made available only in English, was designed mainly to coax the US and British command into using their military power to liberate the Netherlands and its colony. However if the Dutch government wanted independence for Indonesia, it should be in due time, with more 'liberal' Indonesian leaders, ready to resort under the Dutch crown. The military forces of this new 'nation' were to be and remain under Dutch command. So Soekarno and his gang could only frustrate this noble Dutch purpose. The anarchy resulting from all these factors was disastrous for our family members in the Japanese camps. The capitulation of the harsh Japanese did not mean freedom for Melie, Zus and Bart. On the contrary, new dangers arose. bands of young Indonesians often armed with little more than sharpened bamboo sticks



roamed about, randomly killing Chinese, Indo's (half Dutch half Indonesian) and attacking Dutch citizens, especially in Soerabaja, Semarang, Bandoeng and Batavia. Sometimes they were given heavier weapons by, or stole them from the Japanese military. For the Dutch there was often no better alternative than to stay in the former Japanese camps, now turned into evacuee centres. This period is known as Bersiap after the Indonesian battle cry and call to arms: 'Siap!' - Get Ready! 'or Be

Prepared!'; reminiscent of the motto of Baden Powell?

These murderous gangs were called 'permoeda's' that is 'young ones; or 'peloppers' meaning 'pioneer'- a word deriving from the Dutch word 'voorloper.'

These gangs killing indiscriminately were not welcomed by Soekarno. On the contrary the murderous Bersiap period would he felt, be held against the Indonesian nationalists, who would fight for a political goal but not out of blind hatred. However the leader of this young nation had neither the means nor the legitimacy to control his own people. That the Dutch government did not recognize him became quite clear when the acting governor-general van Mook turned to Soekarno to discuss how these peloppers could be controlled. The Dutch Government sacked van Mook for talking to the 'enemy'. Only the queen's interference kept van Mook in his position. The wise lady desired no Dutch infighting in this time of crisis.

Several Indonesian leaders including the Leiden educated Sultan of Djokjakarta, attempted to stop the indiscriminate killing. But the genie had escaped the bottle. There was no alternative than to have the defeated Japanese military guard the Dutch citizens in the camps against the Indonesian fury; together with the Sikhs and Gúrkhās of the British Indian army.

The British Indian army wrought a miracle. They were ill equipped and ill prepared for the task they were given. The political scene was ambivalent and obscure. Thus the British had promised the Dutch that they would help them recover the colony, without knowing how strong nationalist sentiment in Indonesia was. For this lack of military intelligence the British Indian Army paid a heavy toll. When attempting to disarm the Peloppers, the murderous Indonesian gangs of young Indonesians, they ran into heavy weather, especially in Soerabaja. From 27th October to 20<sup>th</sup> November 1945 this town where the Neervoorts had started their family life and where their first child Karel was born, now became the scene of a tragedy. This fierce battle cost more than 600 lives on the British Indian side including that of the British commander Mallaby. On the Indonesian side there were some 6000 killed and 200.000 refugees.



This disaster prompted the British to change their aims. No longer would they try to recapture Indië for the Dutch Colonial Rule. They would help evacuate and protect camp internees, but would only occupy Key areas; just a handful of town centres. Meanwhile they would do everything to prevent a full scale war, by pressuring the Dutch to start serious negotiations with the Nationalists. After this disaster the Indonesians too changed their strategy, avoiding confrontation with the enemy but organizing for guerilla warfare. In spite of the losses, the battle of Soerabaja has gone down gloriously in Indonesian history.

So where was the Dutch military in this chaos? Why weren't Frits and Karel in Bandoeng and Batavia to help their parents? The reason was that the selfsame Mountbatten prevented the Dutch KNIL soldiers from entering the main islands of Indonesia, Java and Sumatra. He had two reasons. The first was that the Dutch government was making no haste in negotiating with Indonesians about the 'promised' independence. The British government was negotiating with Indian nationalists about the independence of India. The United States was for its own historical reason, i.e. their War for Independence against the British, siding with the Nationalists rather than the Colonials. So Mountbatten felt confident in allowing the Dutch military in only after the Dutch government had started negotiations with the Indonesian leaders about independence. Apart from this political reason, the British Indian army was concerned about the behavior of small group of KNIL soldiers, coming out of the camps, who sometimes used Japanese weapons for indiscriminate killing. It was especially Ambonese KNIL soldiers who turned out to be 'trigger-happy,' especially on New Year's Eve. These Ambonese soldiers were Christians and didn't much care for the Muslims in Java and Sumatra. Mountbatten decided that regular Dutch trained military were preferable to these ragged KNIL bands, so, in March 1946, Dutch troops were finally allowed in.

Karel as we saw was with the KNIL engineering corps in Balikpapan, Borneo, which had been liberated by Australian forces even before the Japanese capitulation. Karel was allowed to enter Batavia only on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1947.

Frits likewise was not allowed into Batavia or Sumatra. He was a Dutch military officer. However he was able to enter Sumatra, with the 26<sup>th</sup> British Indian Division, and was sent to Medan, in November 1945.

Directly after the Japanese capitulation Bart Neervoort was full of optimism. He left the camp in which he had been interned in by the Japanese as soon as he could, returned to Berg en Dal and started work again. His wife was in a hospital in Batavia, with Zus acting as nurse. This is where Ursel found them. Unlike the male Dutch military, members of the VK, (Woman's corps) were allowed into Java. Indeed they formed part of the RAPWI – (Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees) who were flown in as soon as possible to help the internees of the Japanese camps. It was historically unique that, - because of the suddenness of the Japanese capitulation and the urgent needs of the helpless internees, - the relief units were in place before the military occupational forces had entered. Usually the relief units would follow occupational forces rather than the other way around. The RAPWI resorting under Mountbatten was supposed to follow the armed forces liberating the East to provide relief for prisoners of war and interned civilians. However when the war ended suddenly with the capitulation of Japan after Hiroshima the RAPWI had an almost impossible task i.e. providing relief over practically all of South East Asia simultaneously. In this curious situation that Ursel Neervoort, as member of the first RAPWI unit to enter Java, happened to meet her in laws before Frits and Karel.





Member of the Vrouwen Korps KNIL.  
before flying to Indië.

Ursel Neervoort-Geiss, front row, second  
from right

My first visit to Indië and meeting my parents in law

Ursel to her parents, sent from Bandoeng, October 6<sup>th</sup> 1945

My dear father, mother, and Lilo, (Ursel's younger sister)

“So yes, I am in Bandoeng now. I hope and assume that this is not the first notification you receive of this fact, because I have tried a hundred and one ways of getting a telegram to you, to tell you that I have found father, mother, and sister Neervoort, and even the house.

Isn't our family history a fairy tale? Mother was right: “The Neervoort family and the Geiss family is on the exact same wavelength.”

But let me recount all my experiences of the last month.

On Thursday September 6<sup>th</sup>, Frits came from Casino to Brisbane to say goodbye, for the zillionth time. He had been ready to depart for a long time, at one time had even embarked on a ship in Sydney (the Oranje), only for the trip to be cancelled at the last moment. But this time it would be for real. And Ursel and Frits were once again extremely lucky, because we would depart on exactly same day. With different destinations, true, but neither of us has to stay behind. We could both start with our work, and the gathering of new experiences, at the same time. In the night of 7 to 8 September, my love brought me to the airport. Afterwards, I was told that he said: “There she goes, and the last and only thing, goddammit, is a cloud of dust in my face.” (Small propeller aircraft.) Yes, there she went: Ursula Neervoort-Geiss, into the completely unknown, and this time on her own.

After several hours we landed in Merauke, (New Guinea) where I set foot on Dutch Indian soil for the first time at four in the afternoon. In the evening we departed again, and, after stopping in Biak, we landed on Morotai (in the Moluccas,) in the late afternoon.

And there, all of a sudden, I became aware of the Indies! Morotai is beautiful! The Nica village at sea is primitive, but well-kept, with an almost Dutch cleanliness. And the inhabitants are very friendly. We were sitting there in lazy chairs at sea underneath the palm trees and enjoyed the peace and the tropical atmosphere. Later on, we walked through the kampong with its peaceful and friendly inhabitants, who greeted us with a 'tabet'. That is something that consistently makes a positive impression on me, this being the politeness of the easterner, both amongst themselves and towards us.

That night we took off to Balikpapan (on Borneo.) But one of the engines played up, and so we returned to our starting point. After a repair we took off again, and returned once more. Taking off a third time, returning a third time. And so we gave up for the day. I did not regret it one bit, as Morotai had stolen my heart. After a thorough repair of the engines, we tried again, and it appeared to go well.

We had a beautiful flight across Celebes, which I was privileged to enjoy in the front of the cockpit. What a fantastic land: mountains, forests, rivers, lakes.... We had just come across, and saw the coastline around Gorontalo underneath us, when the other engine started to play up.

Everybody listened intently. The plane descended, and not just a little. We had to throw out ballast, first the field beds, chests, but we were still losing altitude, so that most of our personal luggage was lost as well.

The crew was considering heading for an emergency airfield, which they remembered from before the war, but how would the Japanese down there respond? As the one engine seemed to be doing its best, and the plane had become a lot lighter, it was decided that we should risk it, and head on. Now, we had 200 miles to go over open sea. Life vests on, rubber boats at the ready, doors open. This went well for a while, but right when we were out of sight of land, the second engine also began to play up. In the beginning, a few of us had been frightened, but now everybody was in a panic. We had faith in our excellent Dutch crew, which would do its very best, but beyond that, we had to accept fate. But that conscientiously puffing little engine kept doing its best, and ultimately brought us to the airstrip of Balikpapan.

What a sigh of relief when our wheels touched ground!!! A gulp from a bottle of liquor served to realize how lucky we were. There were quite a few people to welcome us. General van Straiten ‘himself’, lieutenant colonel Adzes and others. It was only at the airfield that we heard how dangerous our situation had been. Everybody, including our own crew, had really given up on us. As our pilot put it: “Of course I hoped for a happy ending, but I had not expected it that it.”

Finally, we heaved ourselves into a truck, and were driven through Balikpapan, or what was left of it. You couldn’t possibly imagine the state it is in. Where there was once a city, there is now a vast muddy plain, with sometimes the remains of a house. In some of these ruins, sad skinny dark little people found shelter. We were put up in one of the best houses: not more than bare walls with a roof. That’s where we opened our field-beds, and laid down to rest after a primitive rice meal. Next day I went to the hospital, a former cavalry building and stables, the only big building still standing. The black walls were still there, but there was a new roof. After all the terrible pictures I have seen in British magazines of Bergen Belsen and Buchenwald, (German concentration camps) I now saw the real thing. Terrible, no words could describe it. In the former stables lay hundreds of people, if you could call them that, creatures with staring hollow eyes, others with blown up limbs and bodies; hunger edema... The first time I saw this I wanted to flee to a beautiful forest with singing birds or to a meadow with flowers and chirping crickets. Flee far away from this onerous, unending task of turning these consequences of war into a new society. But I forced myself to stay though not for long, and to return the next day. I went a round with the doctor who explained to me case by case what was wrong with the patient and of what the therapy would be. Thus I overcame my emotion as the only way to be able to offer practical assistance. We stayed in Balikpapan for several days, eagerly awaiting the conferences in Singapore, from which the RAPWI (Relief (recovery) Allied Prisoners of War and Internees) and thus our Dutch- East Indies relief group would receive orders.

On Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> September Dutch chief officers came from Singapore with the message that we would all go to Batavia, thus being the first Dutch military to land there. The group consisted of a number of doctors and nurses, several army and navy personnel, the so-called LOC who would be responsible for the prisoners of war and several personnel from the KDP kantoor/office for displaced persons (civilian prisoners in Japanese camps.) The group consisted of some 150 persons, with one or two eccentric figures such as Robert Kiek (a renowned front line journalist.)

We were to land before there was any occupation force so we would have to cooperate with the Japs who until the arrival of an occupation force were responsible for law and order. Actually they are not succeeding in this because of the anarchy typical of a post war post, occupation (by the Japanese.) period. Added to this is the terrible racial issue which gives us Europeans rather a strange position.

On Monday 17<sup>th</sup> September we flew to Batavia. There we encountered a Jap signaling with flags, and we landed precisely where he intended. The same day a Cumberland (Royal Navy cruiser) came into the port of Batavia, Priok, with RAPWI personnel, persons from different nationalities wearing allied uniform. At the airport we were told that one group would move on to Midden Java and another to Bandoeng. How my heart beat. But Yes Ursel was to fly to Bandoeng. It took only half an hour.

There we saw how a Jap gave his sword to our commander, and other Japs pointing out beautiful automobiles and taking our baggage. Dutch citizens were cheering, but the locals, the Indonesians were less enthusiastic. We were driven to Hotel Preanger, There we met a group of Dutch persons with a red cross, they were from the Red Cross and the camps.

And then it happened. When they heard my name several gentlemen asked me if I was related to.....You can imagine how excited I was, especially when I heard that Papa Neervoort was well and had even set up office again somewhere nearby. They were going to find him for me. I nearly burst with excitement and went upstairs to freshen myself. I was hardly ready when I was called. And then we stood facing each other and neither could find words to say. For him it was even more of a surprise than for me for I had been preparing myself for such a meeting for days. Here was an unknown daughter in law who was bringing him news of his three sons. And he could tell me that Moes and Zus were still alive! After a while he took all my letters (e.g. from Frits) and photos back home. Yes on that very day he had returned to Tjoemboeloet, Berg en Dal which had been very well kept by a high Nipponese Piet (Japanese commander.)

The next day was full of new impressions. I belonged to a group which visited all the Japanese camps in Bandoeng. These camps, where there were now since May only men, were rather better than the camps in other parts of Java. \When I returned home (to the hotel ed) there was a beautiful bouquet of orchids with a card from Papa: "Dear daughter, still very moved by the unexpected happiness, that someone whom I already experience as my daughter, brought me the wonderful news that our three boys are alive and have acted as men I hereby send you a flower greeting from your dear mother, father and sister signed. And then I realized that I had found, in this far country, a second home. "

The next day there was another flower homage this time Dalia's from his garden.

*Dear Arsel, from Bart*

"Now that I am after three and a half years, again Master of my house and garden, you my dear daughter who are as it were fallen from heaven the first to receive, also on behalf of Frits and of my wife, flowers from my own garden. It is a morning greeting which links us to Holland as I originally imported these bulbs from Holland. Lots of love." An hour later he came himself and we talked a lot. I heard that Moes and Zus were in Batavia in the Carolus hospital, Moes to recover, Zus to help nursing, after having terrible experience in a camp in Batavia. These camps are indeed terrible. Then I again had luck, for I was sent to Batavia with a message for headquarters. A few hours later, after a magnificent car ride, I arrived in Batavia, in the Carolus hospital. Moes was lying in bed and Zus was next to her. This meeting again was unforgettable. I remained in the hospital overnight, because the situation outside was so dangerous that we were not allowed on the street, and no-one could come to fetch me. For me personally it could not have been better.

The next day back to Bandoeng, with a high Japanese officer next to me as guarantee, and two heavily armed parachutists ( I suppose British ed.) sitting behind me. What a world!

I hope this letter will somehow reach you, I send three copies to different addresses." (also Wimpie in USA via whose granddaughter Suzanne I received this letter)).

*In my thoughts I embrace you all. A kiss from your loving Ursel*



Melie to Mien,  
camp, Batavia

25th December 1945, Christmas Day, Tjideng

Dear Mien,

"We are now in the most notorious camp of Batavia but with 6 persons in a room, it used to be 24 (when the Japs controlled the camp, it is now an evacuee camp under Allied control.) Secondly the notorious Japanese sadist leader of the camp is gone. Third there are good guards here very important (because of gangs of Indonesians attacking Dutch and other citizens.)



“Then came the capitulation of Japan, We can’t use the word Peace here because it was all out war. I was one of the women who went to a hospital in Batavia. Zus came a little later she worked there as a nurse. Soon the men came to visit us. I stayed in that Carolus hospital for some time, and was supposed to go with Zus to a hotel to recuperate but all the hotels were full. So we were sent to a military hospital, well Zus could not stay there and I really hated it, unfriendly, bad food. Then there was part of a room vacant in the Tjideng camp a good friend of ours lived there with her 3 children. She was able to get us beds, and a few pots and pans, a tea pot- we had nothing. So we moved in with her.

Bart lives at Trivelli lane 56, we at Trivelli lane 113. Bart comes to us for dinner, rather boring rice, bread a few cans of meat and the past few weeks fresh vegetables, we have to cook ourselves, we get cooked rice but we recook it for if you see how much dirt and worms it contains...Every few days we get coffee and tea and a tiny portion of milk 1/3 can in five days but it’s enough. In January Bart will be making an orienting flight with an airplane, contractors and colonial administrators will be restarting work in the outlying areas. I do hope he succeeds for this waiting is terrible. If he gets work Zus and I will go to Holland.”

*Much love also for Puck, husband and child,*

*Hug Melie!*

Of course Melie, Bart and Zus were relieved that Karel, Frits and Bart were alive and well, after not having heard from them from more than 3 years that is since 1941. Of course they were delighted that all three were married to nice sensible girls. All the good news came with Ursel, who happened to be the first to meet them.

Bart Th. writes to her parents. One of the facilities for the internees of Tjideng was that they were allowed free airmail.

Tjideng, Batavia 18<sup>th</sup> November 1945

“Honored Mr and Mrs Geiss,

Father and mother of our daughter Ursel and our son Frits.  
Literally as a gift from heaven your/our daughter Ursel came falling out of heaven way September. A few hours after her arrival in Bandoeng I received the message and when I saw her I immediately closed her, somewhat unaccustomed, in my arms. Is it surprising that she, with her personality, as the bringer of good tidings and for so many more reasons, stole my heart immediately, in the same way she did a few days later with my wife and daughter. When she was able to go to Batavia she immediately went to the Carolus hospital to visit them.”

However for the Neervoorts themselves the situation did not improve. As we saw, the insecurity on the streets drove Melie, Bart and Zus to seek protection in the hated Tjideng camp. This camp in Batavia was infamous for the cruel policy of its Japanese commander, who was sentenced to death for war crimes. Since the capitulation it had indeed improved, but it was still no holiday resort. Given the lack of space in protected hotels and on passenger ships headed for Europe, the Neervoorts had no other option than to stay in the Tjideng camp. Indeed with even Dutch passenger ships, such as the Tjibajak on which Broer served, requisitioned by the Allies for troop transport, most evacuees spent many more months in camps. Four and a half months after the Japanese capitulation they are still there. Above was the account Melie gave in a Christmas letter to her sister in America.

Bart continues in his letter to the family Geiss:

“We are honestly happy and joyful that our Frits should bring such a darling daughter home, although the word ‘home’ has a rather meager meaning at present.” In a humoristic variation on the motto “Dutch look out for your business,” it is now “prisoner, look out for your business!”

“That is why it will remain difficult for the time being for me, (Bart ed.) and others, to decide to leave Indië, however difficult the situation is.

In order not to miss meeting our boys we have decided to stay in Batavia,”

(Not having seen Karel and Frits since 1938, it must have been hard for their parents, with Frits so near in Medan, Karel in Balikpapan but neither allowed by the British command to come to Batavia.)

“Although Ursel’s staying in Bandoeng prompts us to go there, and our beautiful house is ready to welcome us. Business concerns also press us to stay in Batavia, for that is where the head of Government (NICA ed.) and the heads of the big oil companies are located, and I want them to know that the company is back in business.

Ursel must have written to you how she found us after several years of imprisonment, tired but not vanquished and very thankful that we all got through, and that our children showed themselves as such tough brave young people, getting through difficult times with such perseverance.

Thankful we are too for what you both have done for our two boys, how much love and support you gave them in the past years.

I am ending this short note to wish you both, also on behalf of my wife and daughter, the very best. We hope that in the near future the situation will have changed so that we can come to Holland as ‘free and happy people’ and then meet you personally to really get to know each other, hand in hand and eye to eye.”

Father and Mother Geiss

The very best wishes,

*B. Neervoort*

Melie also writes to the in laws of Frits

Tjideng, Batavia 18<sup>th</sup> November

1945

Dear Mrs Geiss,

"We just received a letter from Ursel that she is being transferred to Medan. I am so happy for them, because now Frits and Ursel can be together; they have more than deserved it. We will, probably see her on her journey. It's funny that I have only seen Ursel once, but we write to each other as if we had known her for years."

*A.J. Neervoort - Schlahmilch*

Batavia, Tjideng, 3rd December,

1945

*Dear Mrs Geiss,*

"Ursel has been with us for a few days on her way to Medan. We are lucky! Ursel was able to get off to Medan before the real troubles began in Bandoeng. We don't know when Karel and Frits will come to Java, probably as part of a trained military force. That is really necessary, but it's coming too late. You may believe whatever you hear of the crimes of the gangs here, it's really too terrible to talk about. What happened in Soerabaja, Ambarawa, and Semarang and now in Bandoeng. We are so glad we stayed here in Batavia instead of going to Bandoeng, we always sensed it was a trap. One can speak of 'security' only if there is a sufficiently strong military force in place. In Medan it's different. The permoeda gangs are not yet strong there and the Indonesian leaders won't allow their influence. That's a good thing of course.

## *A. J. Neervoort - Schlakmilch*

So Karel and Frits have, as KNIL military, not yet received permission to enter Java.

“Where Bart’s boat is we don’t know, but one is inclined to think wherever our boys are they are better off than here. But it’s a good thing our boys are not here. For the young men the unemployment is the worst thing while there is so much to do. I won’t even try to give you an overall view of the situation here, it’s is so complicated.

Frits wrote that you are indulging him with letters, I believe you have spoiled them for years. I thank you for everything you did for them. O yes we have so much to be thankful for. Even now. Although I did find it very difficult at first to cope with all this uncertainty, the disappointment was so enormous, but now we have gotten used to this prison life, we just take things as they come day by day and making the best of it.

Fatalism is a nasty word, but one has to be a bit fatalistic, although we have a deep trust that with great difficulties will come great strength. That doesn’t minimize the tragedy and sorrow if one’s son or daughter suddenly disappears ‘just like that’, what has happened in Batavia and Bandoeng. That is why we prefer not to go outside the camp in the afternoon. For the same reason I left the hospital as soon as possible, for visiting this hospital is not without danger. If you don’t have a car and you walk there, well several people have paid for that with their lives. Visiting time is in the afternoon. So thankfully we can now just stay in the camp in the afternoons. In Medan this kind of thing does not happen.

We wish you a happy Christmas and for us all better things next year. We wish Frits and Ursel happy 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary. Their wedding was only a year ago can you imagine that, it seems much much longer.

Dear Mrs Geiss we wish you strength, trust and very best wishes

## *A. J. Neervoort - Schlahmilch*

### **Medan**

It would seem that Frits came to Medan, the former home of the Spoors, in October 1945 with the 26th British-Indian Division. These forces, commanded by British officers and under British guidelines, were colorful enough, consisting of a mixture of Sikhs from Punjab, Gurkhas from Nepal and Moslem Tamils. Their task was to protect and evacuate civilians in Japanese camps; to protect civilians from the uprising of the Indonesian revolutionists and to repatriate Japanese soldiers.

Frits Neervoort was a valuable military asset, knowing the country, its culture and the language, Malayan. Upon arrival it seems that Frits resorted under the Netherlands-Indies Civil Administration (NICA), a military organization with mainly civilian tasks, more or less resorting under British command, but in practice a resumption of Dutch colonial administration.

The function that was assigned to Frits that of technical supply officer, must have been somewhat disappointing. He therefore applied for transfer to Batavia to the Ministry of Transport and Water, (Verkeer en Waterstaat), which was granted on 23 April 1946. Ursel was also asked permission to go to Batavia on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1946. It was granted. We hope and assume that by that time Bart Melie and Zus were safely in Holland, receiving a warm welcome from Else and Willie Geiss. So after more than five years Karel and Frits missed their parents again.

Frits of course was bound by military discipline. He received permission to travel for a short period to Holland on business for Volker on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1946. Of course he also wanted to see his parents and sister, whom he had just missed in Batavia.

Frits was given extended leave on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1947 so as to be able to help rebuild his father's company Volker. He was committed to going back into the KNIL if and when his work for Volker would end. He was not allowed to leave Indië without permission from the military authorities. He signed a contract for 3 years i.e. until January 1950.

The military authorities were cooperative enough to transfer Ursel to the locations of her husband. In December 1945 she went to Medan; in April 1946 back to Batavia, from where she returned to Holland having been honorably dismissed from service on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1946.

In other aspects Ursel was not quite satisfied with her military commanders. In letters, of which the Dutch department for KNIL pensions kindly sent me copies she voices three complaints.

The first concerns ladies of vague reputation who register at het hotel in Bandoeng, claiming that they too are members of the Women's' Force, but who wear civilian rather than the obligatory uniform, and who don't follow the rules forbidding walking in the streets. Ursel ask that these women report to her on arrival.

The second concern is about the rather loose way in which the command talks about promotion. What was offered them in Balikpapan before arriving in Java has not materialized. There is even a rumor that the women will be degraded. Ursel ask for promotion but to no avail. She has neither the diplomas, academic degree, nor the position e.g. camp commander, to qualify.

The third request is about clothing. As we saw, their group was commanded to throw their entire luggage overboard when the plane threatened to crash. Since their arrival they have received no new clothes, so that the only uniform they have is the one they flew in, the one they wore on 10<sup>th</sup> September 1945. Ursel asks on behalf of the other girls for shirts, skirts, shoes, bras, and slips; the girls have made themselves pajamas out of parachute cloth. She also asks for suspenders. Are we to believe that stockings were part of the military outfit for the tropics?

It was only on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1946 in Medan that this request for clothing was honored. Which tells us about shortages of clothing and of the slow working wheels of military bureaucracy.



What was going on in the Medan area when Frits and Ursel were there? The 26<sup>th</sup> British-Indian Division entered and occupied the city of Medan without much resistance. As said Frits was enlisted with them for the time being.



As mentioned by Melie, the Bersiap against Europeans was not nearly as intense as on Java.

In North Sumatra the anger of the young Indonesians turned against the Indonesian aristocracy. During a social revolution in the first half of 1946 Sultan's were accused of having sided first with the Dutch colonials and then with the Japanese, oppressing the people. Many sultans in Atjeh were decimated. Two young princes of the Deli Sultanate, former playmates of André Spoor, were beheaded. Right the Sultan's palace was saved. The Sultan himself survived thanks to British protection as did the Maimoon palace, below..

There was more unrest.



On 30<sup>th</sup> April 1946 a Dutch eye witness reports: "In the house it is peaceful, outside there is shooting. By whom and at whom? Who can tell? We are getting used to it."

On 9<sup>th</sup> May: "extremists are developing quite a lot of activity. Every night there are fights which cost lives."

On 29<sup>th</sup> May: "in the last days there seems to be a complete war in the centre of Medan, with many dead and wounded. On the British side alone 15 dead. On the Indonesia side many more. Probably not the extremist militants but villagers."

Jet Smalbraak, quoting letters from her parents in Lieve

Allemaal, 2012

So Ursel and Frits were lucky to get out of Medan before these incidents took place. Or were they? This is what an Indonesian site has to say.

"On December 1, 1945, (so when Frits and Ursel were in Medan.) the Allies put up signs inscribed "Fixed Medan Area Boundaries" (the legal limit in Medan) in various suburbs of Medan. Allied action was a challenge for the youth. On December 10, 1945, the Allies and the NICA launched a massive attack against the city of Medan. This attack caused many casualties on both sides. In April 1946, the Allies managed to occupy the city of Medan."

Indonesian fighters were taken prisoner.



### **Breathing Space in The Netherlands**

One way or another, Ursel was glad to get out of the war zone, and her mother overjoyed to welcome her home. The Geiss family was also host to Melie, Bart and Zus, who at last came out of the hated Tjideng Camp and found a place on a ship back to Holland. Else Geiss positively pampered the family back into good health. She is taking the photograph.



Frits was exuberant in seeing his parents and sister. They all had much to tell each other. They hadn't seen each other since 1938, which makes nearly 8 years of absence to make the heart fonder. Frits also discussed business with his father. He went regularly to the Volker office in Sliedrecht. Peace at last, he thought.

However Frits, still resorted ultimately under military authority, he was a volunteer but now also a conscript. He was committed to return to Indië after a short leave. By then the family lived in the mythical house of the Lions, where there was room for all;

In the typical warm hearted hospitality of Bart and Melie.

There gathered Broer and Peggy with their two children Jill and John Bart. That little two year old fellow was really pleasing to his Oma: - "he stands upright like a peacock." - she wrote to her sister Mien (Wimpie) . Pat was there with her baby Patty and Karel who was rounding off his studies per 1948 in Delft, broken off because of the University shutdown in 1943. André Spoor was recuperating from his imprisonment. His son André was reunited with his parents after all those war years. Ursel with baby often came to visit. Last but not least Wimpie, Melie's older sister came over from the USA. What a reunion with her sister and orphanage friend Bart, after more than 30 years of separation.



And there were trips to the equally hospitable Geiss family in Eindhoven. What a miraculously wonderful time for the two Oma's to be surrounded by so much young gurgling happiness after all those lean and lonesome war years. Those innocent lambs had not the faintest idea how cruel people could be, how murderous. There continuous smiles made the war worn grandparents forget what they had endured.





Melie was a chuckling Oma. She was wonderful with her three daughters in law, each from a completely different cultural and national background. All had experienced the war in different ways. All were exuberant about their new motherhood, learning from Peggy who was most experienced.

Karel and Pat took advantage of the peace in Holland to enjoy their baby daughter Patty.



The new 'Tante' Zus was exuberantly baby minded and remained so all her life, although the camp had made her barren. She was doing a training in child raising. She was a favorite with her nieces and nephews, always ready with some song or game.





Another very welcome guest was Melie's sister Wimpie. A sweet meeting after so many, more than 30 years of only letter writing. From letters she wrote to her daughter Puck in USA we learn more about the family.

"In the spring of 1948 Wimpie' writes how thankful Bart was. Her American son in law has sent insulin for Bart who suffered from diabetes, and could not get medicine in war weary Holland.

Tante Melie is suffering terribly from her arthritis/rheumatism, her hands and feet are so stiff. Little Pattie, Karel's baby is wearing the clothes Suzanne wore as a baby. Tante Melie is sharing the baby and children's clothes amongst the grandchildren. There is nothing in the shops here. Many items are still rationed.

Karel is trying to get a job, and he is finishing his studies in Delft. (There was a heavy unemployment in Holland as in other countries after the war. Ed)

Oom Bart has many relations. He also looks very well. He seems to have enough guilders to keep us all, life is very expensive here.

We get good news from Broer, (who is with his family back in Balikpapan, where Enid and Jenny are born) he is working very hard. Peggy seems to like it out there. Pat too would like to return to Indië. She is expecting another Baby. Peggy also has another baby, (Enid born in Balikpapan, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1948), remember to write to them in Balikpapan. “

Love to all and a fat kiss from your

*Moeder*

### **Back to Indië -Balikpapan, Palembang**

Frits then was soon back in Indië, bound as he was by his military obligations and the contract he had with Volker. Broer and family also went back, to work for Volker. The Neervoorts were determined to save and rebuild the war worn company. Of course Bart was needed in Indië to lead the revival of Volker Indië. He did not return to Bergen Dal. Sober and sensible, coached by Melie, he rented the beautiful mansion out to the Shell/ Bataafse Petroleum Maatschappij, one of his important customers. There Europeans working for Shell could recuperate from the hot noisy cities, spending time in the cool mountain air with the wonderful views across to the volcano's.

Bart and Peggy went to Balikpapan, where two daughters Jenny and Enid were born. The place had been nearly completely destroyed, both by Japanese and Allied bombings. There was work enough. There was a contract for a 100 km road through the jungle. Frits was also in Balikpapan where Ursel and the baby joined him. Then they moved to Pladjoe, in that same compound near Palembang which had miraculously escaped war damage.

The oil and refineries had fallen into Japanese hands more or less intact.



Japanese bombing Palembang

The oil city itself and its harbor had not escaped Japanese bombing. Possibly some of the Volker dredger ships were destroyed.

Palembang was bombed again by the Allies.

Probably the bridge built by Volker in 1940 was destroyed, rebuilt and destroyed again. With typical optimism Bart had proposed at the festive opening of the bridge on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1940, the very day the Nazis attacked the Netherlands, to name it the Wilhelmina Bridge, out of sympathy with the motherland being trampled by the Nazi's. By 1948 the bridge itself and indeed Indië had been more than trampled on.



After the Japanese capitulation, British Indian forces entered Palembang, but they had only the capacity to defend key areas, the city centre and part of Pladjoe. At the end of 1946 the Dutch took over. They obviously had greater ambitions. They entered the harbour on the Moesi River with heavy weaponry, idle for the moment because of a ceasefire, based on the Linggadjati Agreement of 15 November 1946.

At midnight on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1946 however a trigger happy Ambonese KNIL soldier started firing gunshots into the air, to celebrate the New Year. Soldiers of the TNI heard these as the start of offensive action by the Dutch, and shot back. That was the signal of the Dutch Army to start large scale operations.

The Dutch armed forces came down upon the Indonesians very heavily, with bombing from marine ships in the river and fighting on the ground. "All the stops were pulled out," wrote a Dutch military participating in the offense. Jan van Trigt, [duizenddagenindie.wordpress.com](http://duizenddagenindie.wordpress.com)

Not only machineguns and hand grenades but also armored personnel carriers, Humber fighting vehicles, cannon from marine ships on the river Moesi, and bomber aircraft.

According to an Indonesian spokesman there was heavy artillery fire from the river. Fortified with armored vehicles and advanced tanks the Dutch army invaded and attacked the Indonesian army headquarters in the Palembang Grand Mosque, which the Indonesians defended in the name of Jihad (defensive warfare). This truly was a full scale war, with aircraft, cannon fire artillery and heavy clashes and losses of men



Within 5 days and nights Palembang was successfully occupied. The BPM Bataafse Petroleum Company (Shell) returned to Pladjoe. Dutch troops held a football competition with BPM employees.

The Indonesian TNI troops were expelled to 30 km outside the city, where they reorganized for guerilla warfare.

From then on the Dutch strongholds such as the BPM compound Pladjoe were guarded by KNIL posts.

The Dutch warship moored on the Moesi River on the Pladjoe embankment provided the necessary confidence, that everything was under control.



The War of Five Days and Five Nights is still commemorated in Palembang.



Palembang memorial where Indonesian military and civilians who died in this war are buried.





It was in this tense situation that Frits Neervoort left Balikpapan and returned to his beloved Pladjoe, now with a pregnant wife and toddler. The compound was still the same, with its green roofed villa's, its church, swimming pool and hospital. It was only more heavily guarded. Its inhabitants lived in a world of their own, with BPM company money, company shops, church and hospital. Now and again saleswomen come from Palembang to sell cloth from which clothing was sewn in the compound. "We all wore more or less the same clothes," remembered Ursel.

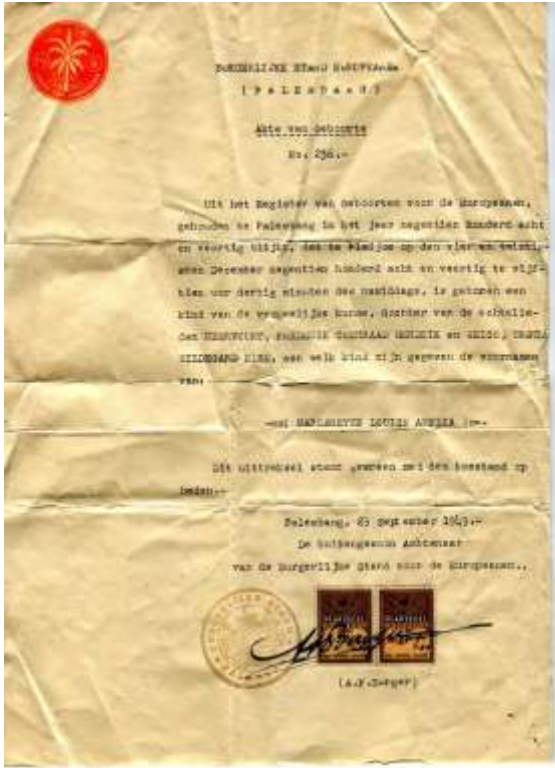


On the 24<sup>th</sup> December 1948 I was born, in the compound hospital.

Only decades later did I learn that on that very day the Security Council of the United Nations held an emergency meeting to condemn the Dutch occupation of Djogjakarta. The second Police action had started only days before, on 19<sup>th</sup> December. The Dutch command had waited for the UN Security council to go on Christmas holiday. Then they flew into Djogjakarta where the TNI command and Republican Government were located. The military high command managed to escape. Soekarno however let himself be taken prisoner, smiling, knowing that International opinion would be on his side. He was taken to and exiled in North Sumatra, first touching ground in Brastagi, André's holiday resort.

The capture of Soekarno was a signal for the TNI to intensify guerilla activities. The Dutch ignored UN summons to release Soekarno and intensified its counter attack, using young Dutch conscripts with no tropical experience, no decent training and certainly no anti-guerilla experience. What they did have was heavy artillery and air support.

In the first eight months of my life more Indonesian lives were lost than in the rest of the Indonesian war. In 1949, during and after the Second Police Action, more than 1000 Dutch and KNIL military were killed, against 100.000 Indonesians, military and civilians. This should be compared to 150.000 Indonesians, between 1945 and 1949, i.e. in the whole Dutch-Indonesian war; as against 6200 on the Dutch/KNIL side. In the Palembang area, it was during 1949 'turbulent' as a Dutch Defence spokesman



us children.

put it.

It is no wonder that in this situation my father was reluctant to go to Palembang to register my birth. That happened only after the ceasefire of 15 August 1949. So I was registered 9 months after my birth.

The document is signed by the special functionary of the Registry for Europeans. I was entered from my birth as one of a privileged race.

A remnant of the racial discrimination that Queen Wilhelmina promised, on the 7<sup>th</sup> December 1942, would be abolished. It was now 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1949.

Luckily there was a church in the secured Pladjoe compound grounds, so I could be Christened.

Of course we had a lovely baboe to look after



## 9. A Farewell to Indië



Many if not most of the Dutch who had endured the 'jappenkampen' and the Bersiap never went back.





The Neervoorts returned to Indië after a short period of recuperation in Holland. Frits as we saw went to Balikpapan, where his wife and baby joined him in 1947, and then on to Pladjoe. Broer and family went to Balikpapan where Enid and Jenny were born.

Leaving Melie and Zus in Holland for further recuperation, Bart went back to Batavia, still the economic heart of the colony His wife and daughter were to join him there in the last months of 1948.

Bart was full of beans. He acquired a major contract for the construction of a 100 km long road from Balikpapan right through the jungle to Bandermasin. A task comparable to that of the construction by Daendels of the great Post road through Java, at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Bart explained that the Volker Company was using the most modern machinery instead of the forced labor, as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when thousands of Javanese laborers died. The heads of local rulers who did not comply were put on sticks along the road. Of course Bart Neervoort's approach was entirely different, concerned as he was with his employees and hired laborers.

Perhaps their dream, hope and even realistic expectation was, after all those, 6 war years to return to Berg en Dal, which they had been forced to leave in early 1942.



Alas, another tragedy lay waiting. On board of the ship coming back from Holland in 1948, Melie had fallen ill.

“Bart to Karel, in Suriname, Zus in Hazerswoude, Wimpie in Summit, USA

Batavia, 9 January 1947

Our dear wife, mother, sister, she is no longer with us, she died on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1949 and we carried her to the old churchyard of Batavia ‘Tanah Abang’, amidst many beloved and flowers.”



Taman Prastrasi Tanah Abang, Batavia

Why is it that every time I try to translate this letter from Dutch into English, I break down in tears? Is it because if anything, this history shows the frailty of loving goodness, for still as she is buried Indië is a country torn by war. Or is it that somehow trust and optimism endures, remains in spite of both the suffering and the aggression that caused it. For the shiny example of my loving compassionate Oma has endured, as I sit 66 years later crying my eyes out for her.

“For there she lay, with eyes closed and hands folded, with a calm and serene face, and expression, young and innocent, shining with love and patience.

Once in 1916 a friend asked her to write down a saying, so he could carve it into a beautiful piece of wood. She wrote: ‘Where love lives, the Lord will give his blessing.’

Until the last love lived in her.

As she lay dead her hands were folded  
over the Bible

Oom Karel Thierij gave her for our wedding.

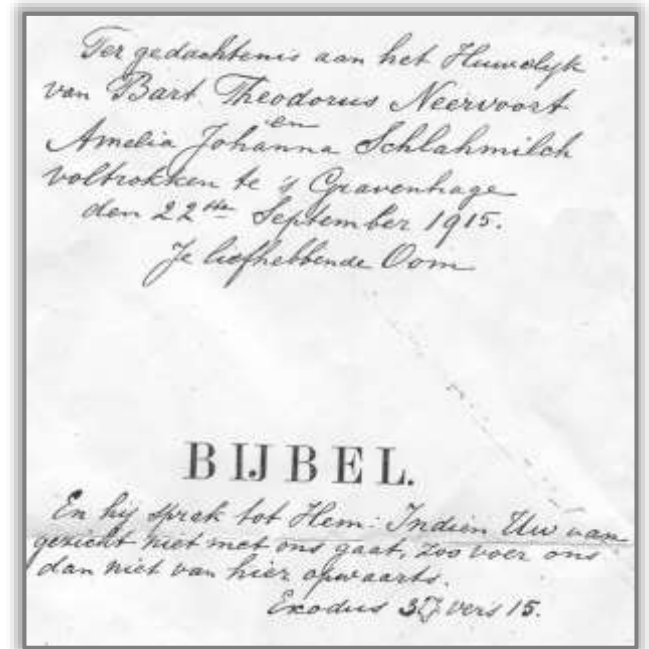
It lay open on the first page where Oom Thierrij had written:

And he (Moses ed.) said unto Him,

‘If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.’

Exodus 33 verse 15”

Well it seems to me, that His Presence was with my Oma, in Berg en Dal, in the high mountains of success and happiness as in deep dales of deprivation and death.





As Opa continues: “Well we might be saddened now but at last a deep sense of gratitude will overcome us, that we have been granted the blessing of living near to and with a human child of such lofty aspiration and such a wide understanding of love, as the one whom we now have lost.

My dear wife, mother of my children, the dear loyal sister,  
May you rest in Peace.”

*Papa*

Bart however, was not one to sit down by the waters of Babylon and weep.

He was after all a NEERVOORT.

Soon he was back in business, flying between Batavia and The Hague. He also flew to USA in August 1949, sensing that the growing unpopularity of Dutch business as the Dutch-Indonesian war dragged on, was providing opportunities for American business, in Indië and in the emerging state Indonesia to be. The American Administration was rightly seen by the Indonesians as more than friendly to their cause. The USA had already stopped the Marshall Aid to Indië, sensing that at least some of those dollars were being used for armaments against the Indonesians rather than for the reconstruction of Indonesian cities and infrastructure. The Neervoorts must have resented this development, for US dollars for their reconstruction projects in Balikpapan, where Broer was active, or in Palembang where Frits was stationed.

The Neervoorts were opposed to the second Police Action and the capture and exile of Soekarno. This only led to intensifying the war, and as is well known, business needs peace and security to thrive. Doing business in a war zone is very difficult. The European employee's had to be secured, and who of the Indonesians could one trust? Was it worth investing if any investments could easily go down the drain by acts of violence? Not to speak about secure and predictable flows of raw materials, and secure and predictable outlets. It seemed as if the century old collaboration between the state and the private sector, which had made Indië great, had dissolved. Unrealistic political and military goals were chased after, to the detriment of both the Indonesians and Dutch business. But what could a business man do besides voicing his opinion in his various social and business circles.

His main responsibility was after all, his own business, his own employee's.



So Bart Neervoort flew to the USA, to talk to the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey, which ran a refinery in Palembang, just across the river from Pladjoe.

By coincidence New Jersey was the State where the sister of his late wife lived. So he also went to Summit to see Wimpie. She had made a very favorable impression on him when she visited Scheveningen in the summer of 1948. Now he saw her in her own home, with her granddaughter Suzanne. Of course he also met her daughter, Sophia, whose name 'Puck' little one, stuck with her Dutch family from when she was a small child.

Both Puck and her mother Wimpie, who had known unhappiness in their marital life, probably expected a sunny future from closer connection with Oompie, 'little uncle' Bart.

The relationship did grow closer, leading to a wedding in Scheveningen on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 1950



Frits wrote a report of the wedding to his cousin Puck, the daughter of the bride.

From Frits Neervoort to Puck

1950, 29<sup>th</sup> April

(Written on the stationary of his father with name and address crossed out - waste not want not!

B.Th. Neervoort: Rijswijk 20 Djakarta/Jan van Nassuastraat 20 Den Haag. Frits lived with the Geiss family, Lijsterlaan 40 Eindhoven and for the wedding was staying at Kurhaus hotel Scheveningen.)

*Dear Puck,*

“It is Saturday, 2 days after the party and we are still in a party mood. It was a great honor to be present at this event. Luckily you have experienced Papa and Wimpie together, and you have seen how well they are suited to each other so you can imagine how they were on this day so important for them both. Yes Puck they were very happy on this day and they were beaming. Your dear mother was a beauty and Papa had a friendly calm. He is rather busy, I would even say restless. But now it will be much better with him.



Then follows a day by day report. First Frits and Ursel left Eindhoven since their return to Holland they were staying with Ursel's parents. Then we went shopping in The Hague to get fitting dress for Ursel. At about 4 we came to hotel Kurhaus in Scheveningen en met Wimpie for the first time. I can hardly find words for how I felt and how rich I became already in those first hours with her. O Puck it is so wonderful that this is in such perfect harmony with the living memory of my mother, your aunt Melie. Moes (Melie) has meant so much for us and if you would know us you would realize how she has made us her life's work. Her suffering and dying has left an unforgettable impression on us. She is still for me a living thought and it is wonderful how she lives on in this new marriage. It is all so perfect, Puck. Yes those two, they really love each other and on top of that they are so well suited to each other. I feel richer and so I hope do you Puck.

Wednesday we went in two groups to buy rings, Papa with Ursel and Wimpie with Zus and me. Then it began to rain, but Wimpie with her beautiful suit and hat covered in red roses was determined to walk to the town hall. Significantly as we came nearer to the town hall, the sun came out and the weather improved for the rest of the day. We were really moved by the speech made by the official there, usually it's just the usual romantic story but now he specially spoke to the bride

"Remember those who went before you".

Thus providing a link between the past and the present.

The rest of the day we rolled from one festive dinner to the other. A lunch with all the brothers and sisters. Of course the brothers Neervoort and the sisters Schlahmilch knew each other from the orphanage so that gave a good atmosphere. There was an a priori bond between them.

Then to the photographer where we posed endlessly. Soon you will see the result!

In the evening really the only friend of Papa from his business executive board, Mr Ursone. Your poor mother was actually rather tired by that time, and as Mr Ursone was rather politically interested, "What do you think of Mr Jessup, Mr



Taft etc. ?? But she managed to cope rather well. She was thus able with these friendly people to get some idea of Dutch politics.

Thus the first day passed, its festivity heightened by the most beautiful flowers and many congratulatory telegrams.

The next day we had a gezellige (untranslatable word) dinner at a Javanese restaurant. Afterwards at a bar with a Hungarian gipsy band with violins. So that brings me to the reason for writing that is to wish you a very happy birthday. This will be a lonely day for you, the first birthday without your mother, but with the realization that you now have a father again.

Puck, I am ending now an with the heartfelt wishes from your mother, and best wishes from Ursel,"

*Your Frits*

After all deprivation and sorrow, Wimpie, Bart, Ursel, Frits and Zus simply had a wonderful time. Broer in Australia and Karel in Suriname wished them the very best. Frits and family had just come back to Holland.

Bart certainly had not bid Indonesia farewell. He was planning to return to Indië after the summer, but first he had a good time with his new wife.

Now we get the family updates, which used to come from Melie, from Mien, also called Wimpie. She also takes on the concern for her sister Fietje.

Wimpie to Puck,

16th May 1950

“Written from a lovely hotel in a beautiful park in Arnhem. Frits and Ursel and the children are coming for the weekend. Oompie has difficult and important business problems, but he always remains cheerful. Broer wants to emigrate, to Canada or Australia, that’s easy with a family. In Balikpapan life is very difficult, it is not safe on the streets, theft, strikes let’s hope something comes out of that chaos. If Oompie gets that contract in New Guinee Broer can go there. His contract in Balikpapan is till august. Frits is working in Delft and staying with his old landlady from his student days. Ursel and children are still in Eindhoven with Ursel’s’ parents, but they are trying to find a house very difficult in Holland at the moment.



Wimpie to Puck  
1950

5th December

“ I hope you don't mind that I opened your Christmas package on Saint Nicholas feast. I was so curious. We won't be having a Christmas tree to put it under. The place is just too small. Zus and Vonnie are working hard on their studies (after losing so many years in the camps). On St Nicholas eve Oompie and I took them out for dinner in Amsterdam and provided them with enough sweets to last several weeks.

Broer writing from Sydney is upset that he cannot find a house for his family there. It is getting more and more dangerous in Indonesia.”

Wimpie to Puck,  
1950

27<sup>th</sup> December

“What will 1951 bring us? Andre Spoor is back from Indonesia for good. I went to visit Fie in her new home called House of Rest and Joy in Wassenaar. Perhaps you can send her a card. “

Now tragedy followed on the heels of happiness. A year later Wimpie too died of cancer, on the 19<sup>th</sup> April 1951, a year after the wedding. Her daughter Puck, who came over from USA, was too late to say farewell. Wimpie was already in coma.

Even then Bart did not dive into despondency. He did his best to keep the family correspondence going. In the past he could leave writing to the boys to Melie, and recently to Wimpie.

Now he is the only parent left. And he has a new child, Wimpie's daughter Puck.



Bart to Puck, 25th May 1951 from Oom Bart (a few weeks after her mother's death)

“I went to Scheveningen with Zus and remembered the many times I had walked there with my dearest, Wimpie and how we talked. It was during her holiday here in Holland 1948. It was then that we walked and talked together for the first time. I suddenly said to her

“Mientje, you are the ideal wife for a man without thinking I could be that man.”

Bart keeps his drive for the business in spite of all the difficulties.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> July he writes a birthday letter to Karel in Suriname, in time for his birthday on 27<sup>th</sup> July. Here he is taking over his wife's responsibilities. He is just back from Indonesia by KLM.

“The journey was good, but the situation in Indonesia is difficult. Especially the way he and his legal advisor and colleague Mr Ursone were treated really made them angry.

He refers here to the Dutch head of the foreign exchange department. The Indonesians there were cooperative but not this Dutch guy.”

(One might wonder what this Dutchman was doing controlling the currency exchange in the sovereign state of Indonesia. When Indonesia gained independence they also gained the debts of former Indië. Well not all 6 million. The Indonesian delegation argued that it seemed unjust for the new country to inherit the debts, 2 million that Indië had used to finance the military actions, the first and second police action and the pacification and purification operations that lay in between. But the Dutch were eager to get those remaining 4 million repaid as soon as possible, and that required tight currency control. Export companies like the palm oil and tobacco plantations earned enough hard currency. Companies like Bart Neervoort's Volker, which were trying to rebuild Indonesi, after 8 years of war, suffered from the tight currency exchange controls.)

“WE need currency to pay our Dutch management personnel and to buy material in Holland. Yes the Indonesians were much more flexible but the Dutch director had a veto.”

“We have more than enough work. We have just started a big project for Caltex (California Texas Oil Company). If we can get good European and Indonesian management we will have work for 6- 8 years. We now have a 7 day workweek here with 7 hours a day. In practice people here work only 3-4 hours. The workers are organized into communes whose leaders are raising demands for pay, clothes and food, which would even be too high in a well-functioning economy. Where this will end, nobody knows. The whole situation makes it difficult to find Europeans who will sign a contract for a longer period of time. Dear Karel and Pat, my very best wishes for your birthday and a big kiss from.”

### *Papa*

Understandably, Melie would say, the impoverished Indonesian workers were eager for financially impossible pay rises. Understandably Bart did not want to pressure his sons to work and live with their young families in the still unstable Indonesian society. Perhaps he suggested they get experience elsewhere and return and join him later when the Indonesian situation was stabilized. It was not to be. Karel was in Surinam, one of the few regions which had escaped war destruction. Broer was starting from scratch in Australia. Frits had a contract for Apapa wharf in Nigeria, then a well ordered British colony. Bart was determined to stick it out in his beloved Indonesia.

So it seems Bart was again true to his name Neervoort. He was very much alive when he suddenly became ill. A week or so after his birthday letter to Karel, Bart entered the Red Cross Hospital in The Hague.

He went down so very unexpectedly, he was as usual as full of plans and projects to be pushed through. His heart was still with what was now Indonesia. It was not to be.



Zus to Puck,

6<sup>th</sup> August 1951

*Dear Puck,*

Today your letter for Papa came and I (Zus) opened it, not out of curiosity but because Papa is ill and cannot read it. Dear Puck, it is so terrible for me, to have to tell you, on top of all, your own problems, that Papa is ill. He is in the Red Cross hospital and is really very ill. A general blood poisoning caused by an inflamed tooth, with malfunctioning liver and kidneys. The doctor is doing what he can but he is pessimistic and tells us we should be prepared for the worst. Papa took ill on Saturday and was admitted to the Red Cross hospital. On Sunday he wasn't too bad but he has become worse today, with a high temperature.

When you read this letter, Puck I can imagine how shocked you will be and cry out, this is impossible. That's still what I am inclined to think. It can't be true that Papa is so ill; he has always been healthy until two days ago.

I sent the boys a telegram that Papa is ill. They will know by Saturday it things get worse.

Puck I wish you very great strength to cope with this, it seems we have to bear heavy burdens. I wish you great strength to keep standing. As soon as there is more news you will hear it."

*Love Zus*

It did become worse.

Heden overleed zacht en kalm na een kortstondig ziekbed onze lieve  
Vader, Behuwd- en Grootvader, Broeder, Behuwdbroeder en Oom

**Bart Theodorus NEERVOORT**  
Directeur van de Volker Aanneming Maatschappij N.V.

in de ouderdom van 60 jaar.

	Namens de familie
Paramaribo	Ir. K. B. Neervoort P. Neervoort—Howard
Apapa-Lagos (Nigeria)	Ir. F. C. H. Neervoort U. Neervoort—Geiss
Oberon (N. S. W.-Australië)	B. Neervoort P. Neervoort—Mac Guffie
's-Gravenhage	A. J. Neervoort
Rhode-Island (U. S. A.)	S. A. Crowell—Niemants R. A. Crowell en kleinkinderen.

's-Gravenhage, 11 Augustus 1951.  
de Savornin-Lohmanlaan 477.

De teraardebestelling is bepaald op de Algemene Begraafplaats „Westduin“  
Woensdag a.s. te half twaalf. Vertrek van Rode Kruis Ziekenhuis, Zuid  
Buitensingel 1 te elf uur.

Bart Theodore Neervoort died in the harness.

I am sure that my Oma and Opa would like this history to end on a positive, optimistic note.

We have so much to be thankful for, Oma would say.

What better ending than a wedding?

A celebration of the family ties between the Spoors and the Neervoorts. Unlike the weddings in the history of this family, this was an ordinary wedding. Unlike Bart Theodoor Neervoort, André was present at his own wedding. Unlike the wedding of Broer, Frits and Karel, the wider family knew about the wedding. Many family members were present.

Now there was time and money and full shops in which to buy special outfits for the wedding. Thank goodness clothes were no longer rationed. Even the children like myself wore lovely party dresses, and black lacquer shoes. Unlike Ursel, the bride Zus was not wrapped in an old curtain.

The family members even spread over long distances, were free to communicate and thus knew about, the festive occasion. The family Neervoort and Spoor were joined together, at last just ordinary people in ordinary circumstances.

How happy the parents of the bride would have been to see this spectacle!

## Wedding of Zus/Melie Neervoort & André Spoor

Centre, Bride and Bridegroom now living in the Netherlands

Left: Anna Spoor, Right father of the groom André Spoor, now settled in the Netherlands.

The Frits Neervoorts, Ursel, with the author, Marlies come over from UK.

Bartje Neervoort, on the right in British school uniform, one of many male descendants named after Bart Theodoor,

Right from back Pat & Karel, stopping over between Suriname and New Guinea, where Karel joined the Dutch government infrastructure ministry, a few years before Soekarno took control of New Guinea. After that the family settled in the Netherlands.

Fietje Dekker, the daughter of Melie's sister Zus from Hazerswoude.

Left back is Vonnie, on the right her husband, Coen, unfortunately no children



Can we spot Arie Poldervaart, the colleague of Bart Th. in the Bandoeng building projects?



Wedding of André Spoor and Melie/Zus Neervoort  
In Hilversum 28 December 1960  
At the town hall designed by the famous architect Dudok.

## 10. Family Trees by John Bart Neervoort



## Family Tree

Branches in the wind  
Still standing here together  
One more storm to weather  
We'll get through it yet  
So we're gathered here  
Holding on to each other  
Those gone before we won't forget  
Father down to son, mother to daughter  
Thicker than water, we are made of this  
From the Earth we rise  
To the Earth returning  
We'll keep a candle burning  
For the ones we miss.  
May it always comfort us to know.  
The family tree will always grow.  
It's stronger than the wind can blow.



John  
Bart

Neervoort from Australia  
with home made Duck car.





John Bart, maker of the family tree, is the son of Broer. Left is Broer having a few happy days in Scheveningen with his mother, before leaving for Indië.

After a difficult period in Balikpapan, Broer and his family emigrated to Australia, where they had a difficult start up. See below for John and his sisters Enid and Jenny, born in Balikpapan, near their temporary shack/home.

Years later Broer started a supermarket, with financial support from Frits and Zus.



# Portrait Gallery Schlahmilch - Neervoort



Left: Sophia  
Schlahmilch van der  
Stijl



FCH Schlahmilch



Amelia, Sophie  
Johanna,  
Wilhelmina



Johanna Maria  
Neervoort- Loucas



Amelia  
Neervoort-  
Schlahmilch



Bart Th. &  
Frits



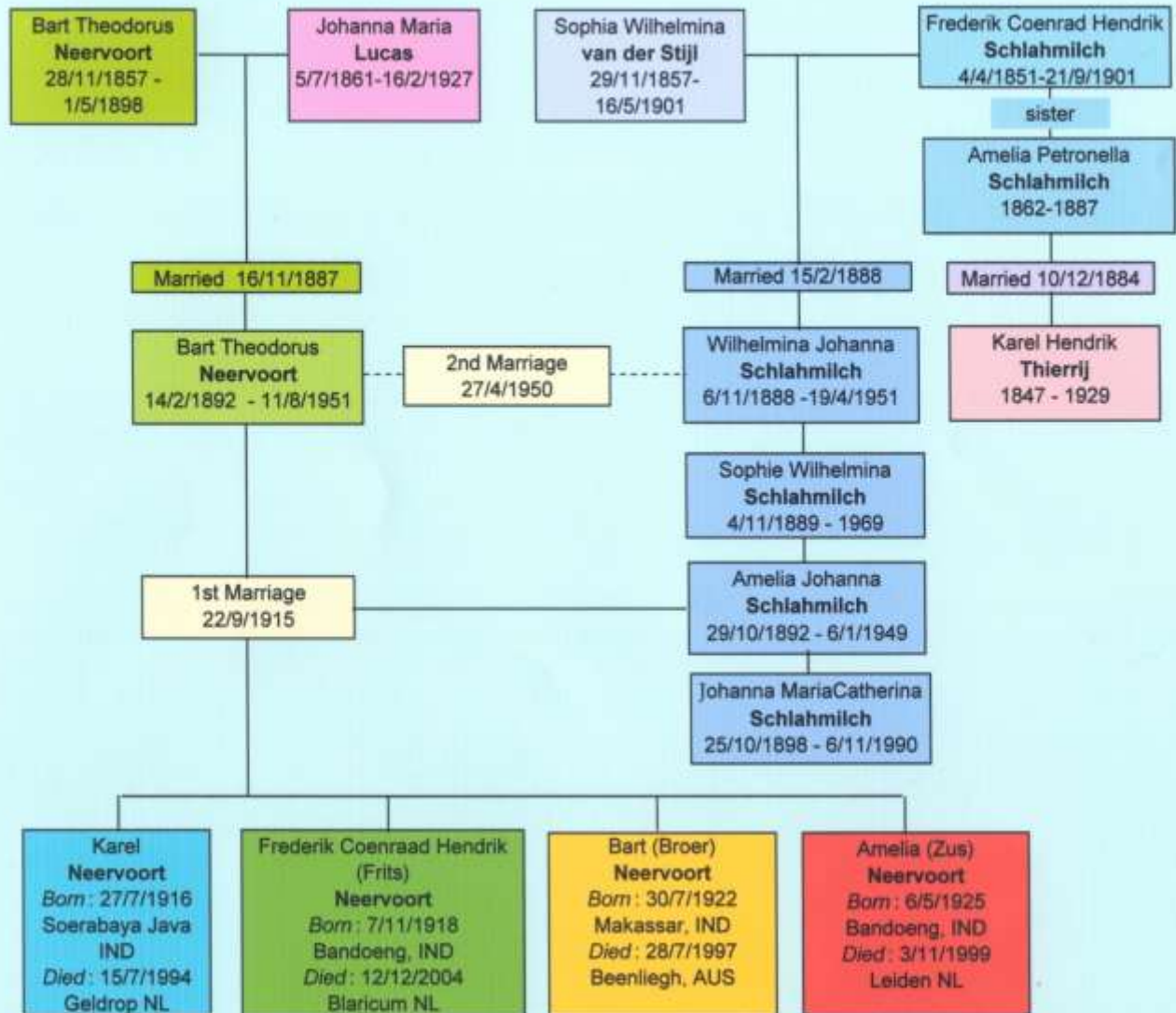
From left: Frits, Melie,  
Zus, Bart Th. Broer &  
Karel Neervoort



Bart Th. Neervoort & his  
2<sup>nd</sup> wife Wilhelmina

## Neervoort

## Schlahmilch



## Picture Gallery Neervoort Sons



Karel



Patricia  
Howard



Frits and Ursel  
Geiss



Bart/Broer



Margaret  
MacGuffie  
John Bart



Pat, Karel, Patty



, Marlies &  
Baboe



Enid, Jenny, Jill, John Bart