

Two wars
Two families
in the Dutch East Indies

Marlies ter Borg-Neervoort

Indië under Japanese occupation

The families Neervoort and Spoor were divided. Sons Frits, Karel and Bart could not communicate with their parents Bart and Amelia Neervoort. The same held for Andre Spoor with his parents. In all these war years these young men André had only the vaguest idea of what their parents and sisters were going through. Of course the main historical facts were known, in Nazi occupied Holland via the clandestine Radio Oranje. On 7th 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 Dutch East Indies 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.

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, together with an underestimation the Japanese.



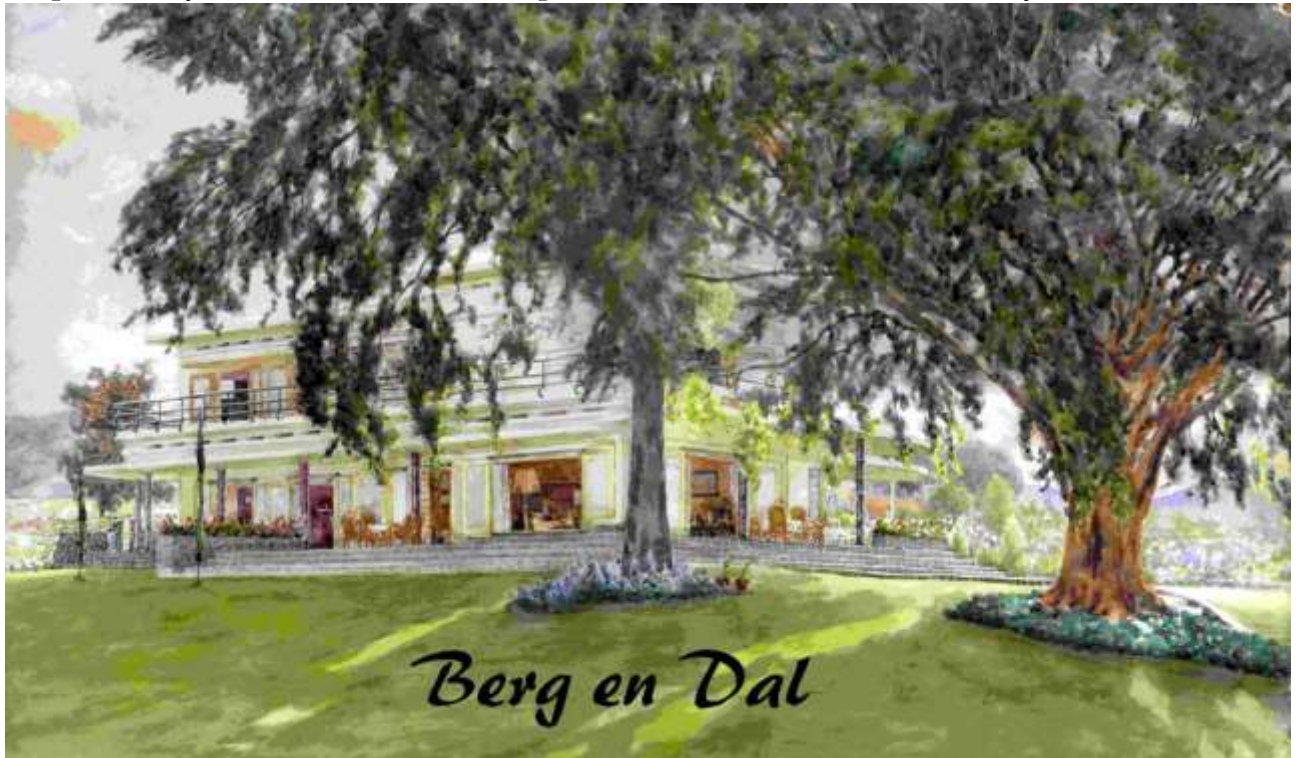
The first family member to experience any impact from the war was the elder André Spoor. He had just become resident of Pontianak and the outlying region in the Northwest of Borneo. André requested information from the military before accepting the post, early in December 1941.



KNIL commander H. van Poorten reassured him. "You will be in charge of a region that lies in a relatively quiet part of the archipelago just opposite the unassailable British fortress of Singapore. The Japs will stay out of your way." When André said goodbye to his brother Simon, he told him what the commander had said. Simon was silent. He knew that Pontianak, so near to Singapore, was dangerous spot, but he was not allowed to say.

On 11th December 1941, Pontianak was attacked by nine Japanese bombers. On the 8th of February 1942, Japan attacked the Allied stronghold of Singapore, the major British military base in South-East. The fighting lasted only a week. It resulted in the largest surrender of British-led military personnel in history. About 80,000–120,000 British, Indian and Australian troops became prisoners of war, transported to work on the infamous Burma "death" railway. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill called the ignominious fall of Singapore to the Japanese the "worst disaster" and "largest capitulation" in British military history.

Contrary to the orders of his chef, the Governor of Borneo, Resident Spoor had ordered all women and children to be evacuated. There was a rumor, which spread even to his son André in the Netherlands via the Red Cross, that Resident Spoor himself had been beheaded by the Japanese in the same way as the governor of Borneo. That was punishment for the fact that the on the 18th of January, the Dutch commander had ordered the destruction of the Balikpapan oilfields. Indeed on the 20th of February 1942, the Japanese murdered some 78 Dutch persons including prisoners of war, a representative of the Red Cross, and even priests and patients in a hospital. They were shot and their corpses thrown into the water. Luckily André had



escaped into the jungle. There he contracted pains which were thought to be caused by cancer. He was smuggled across the sea by a loyal servant to Java. Back in Bandung, it turned out to be a stomach ulcer. The Spoors – André, Anna and Vonnice – were reunited under the safe roof of Berg en Dal, the Neervoort residence in Bandoeng. Bandoeng was indeed the last Dutch stronghold. It was far from the coast, in the mountains. It was to Bandoeng that the Governor General van Mook 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. A handful of experts thought to be of importance for the war effort from the outside had been flown to Australia at the last minute. Simon Spoor was one of them.

The Japanese set to work at once to undermine the population in general and the Dutch in particular. They froze bank accounts. They threw people out of their houses. Berg en Dal was "requisitioned." The Japanese implementing this decision urinated on the furniture and ripped the portrait of the queen from the wall and tore it to pieces. The family moved to a much smaller house in Bandoeng town. There Melie set the girls to knitting for the babies expected by KNIL families whose fathers had been imprisoned. Soon nearly all male Dutch citizens were taken prisoner.

Not all, some men escaped and spent two years in a resistance movement. Some had their headquarters very near to Berg en Dal, in a hut originally built for the two teenage sons Karel and Frits

De acht kooien, 8 berths because 8 boys could sleep there was a cabin built for and by the boys up the mountain....design Frits Neervoort



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At first it was a place in which teenager boys could get away from the watchful eyes of their parents it received other functions as time passed and the boys were away in Holland for study. Their sister made the place cosier and offered the hut to her girls scouts group. It was also a meeting place for the Elizabeth Loge, a female group linked to the Bandung Free Masons Loge St Jan. These women were dedicated to humanitarian aid and the easing of the relations between the races. With money from Bart Neervoort his wife initiated, with the members of the Elisabeth Loge, lodgings for young women who at the age of 16 had to leave the orphanage in which

they grew up. Reminiscent of her and Bart's growing up in an orphanage. Finally the hut was used by the Dutch scouts who joined in the resistance against Japan, until they were finally caught and sent to Japanese camps. Their names are remembered with respect:

The scouts Herfi Bouman, Dick van Logchem, Henk de Lange, Henk Greeven, Joop van Erp en Gerard Schouten, under supervision of 'luitenant' W. van der Vorst.

But most men were interned more or less immediately. André sr. was one of the first. He was held in the Soekamiskin prison, together with many other high officials, including H.J. Spit, president of the Council of Indië, a kind of quasi parliament. Spit was the highest official left in Bandoeng, for the governor General was in Australia.



The treatment in this prison was relatively mild, but the inmates were hostages, to be killed if and when high level Japanese were killed.

Bart was also taken prisoner but to which camp is unknown. Probably near Palembang where he was forced to manage the repair of infrastructure and dredging to start up the export



of oil again. In Palembang, Pladjoe was one of the few oil places not destroyed by the Dutch as for instance Balikpapan. Obviously infrastructure and buildings had been destroyed during their attack, and his cooperation was needed to repair and rebuild them. This was forced labour with the threat that his family and colleagues would be killed if he refused.

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 complained protested and to the Japanese commander. Without success.

The women and their children were just numbers.

Neervoort, A.J.	39	F	17039	6-5-1925
Neervoort-Schlamilch, 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. Each person had a thin mattress of 60 cm for themselves.

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

Spoons 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.

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 9th 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 15th 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,¹ 26 February 1945
Radio Operator Bart
Neervoort

Dear Frits and Ursula,

Today I received a letter from Peggy dated 19th 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!

. 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 ed.)

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.

¹ 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.

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. ed.) 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. ed.)

"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 Ed.)

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. ed.)

"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.”

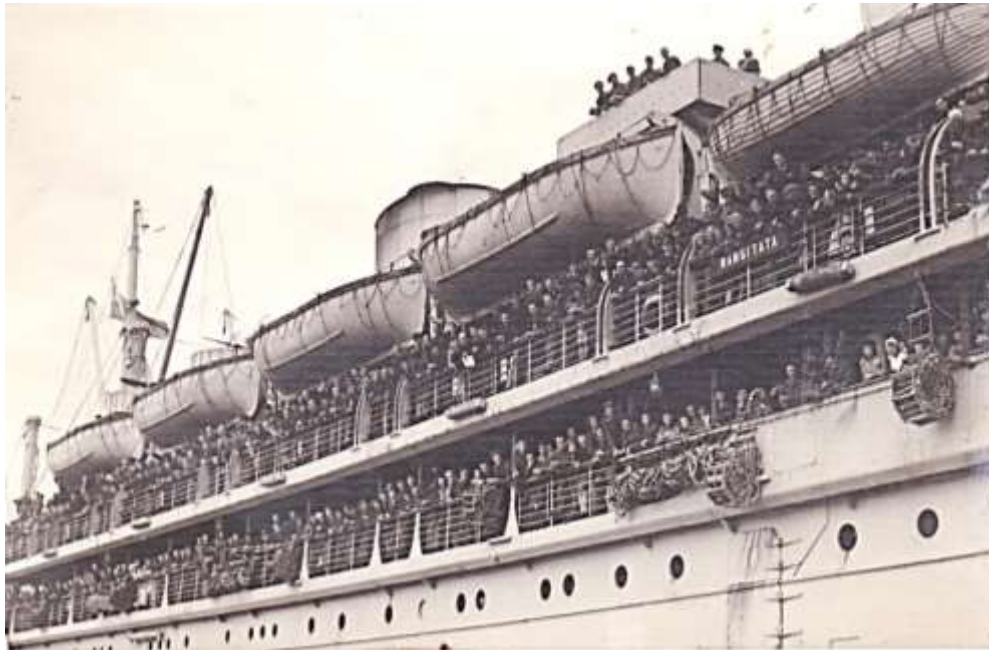
This ship was, before the war, serving passengers between Holland and Indië, but after the Nazi occupation of Holland, sailing under British command with a crew of Dutch and Indonesians. With a capacity of 2300 military she was used for troop transports to and then from the East. Also returning with refugees from the Japanese camps ed.)

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



Tjibajak the ship of Broer

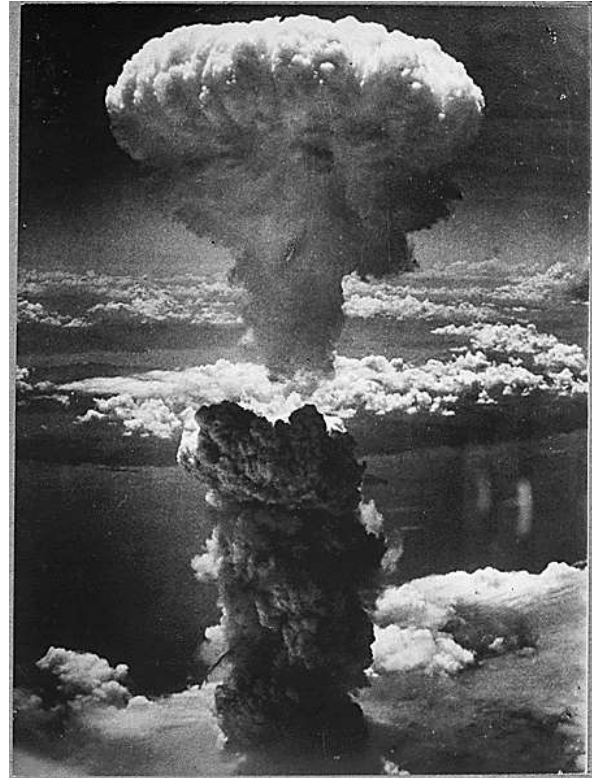
On the 8th May 1945, three days after the complete liberation of the Netherlands, Karel, Frits and Ursel sailed as KNIL military for Australia, where they were to undergo further training.



They arrived on the 19th 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 17th 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 19th 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.

Revolusi

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 17th 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, they refused to talk to the Republican leaders, Soekarno and Hatta because they were war criminals and Fascists. One might see this as contrary to a speech held by Queen Wilhelmina on 7th December 1942, in which independence was held out as a promise for the Indonesians. Upon request of Mountbatten this speech was repeated by the Dutch authorities on the radio in September 1945. However the Dutch government stubbornly refused to talk to Soekarno, at a time in which the British were engaging with national leaders in their colonies such as Burma and India.

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 in Dutch as Bersiap after the Indonesian battle cry and call to

arms: 'Siap!' – Get Ready! 'or Be Prepared!'; reminiscent of the motto of Baden Powel?

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 20th 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. The battle 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 22nd 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 26th 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.





Ursel Neervoort-Geiss, in the RAPWI group boarding the plane to take them from Australia to Batavia.

My first visit to Indië and meeting my parents in law

Ursel to her parents, sent from Bandoeng, October 6th 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 6th, 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 ed.) 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 Kalimantan/Borneo ed.). 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!"

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 16th 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 ed.)

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 ed.) period. Added to this is the terrible racial issue which gives us Europeans rather a strange position.

On Monday 17th 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 ed.) 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 (the home town of the family Neervoort ed.). 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 ed.) 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 ed.)

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.

Letter from her father in law Bart Th Neervoort

"Dear Ursel,

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 (e.g. Mien/ Wimpie in USA)."

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

Bersiap and Berg en Dal

Written by Marlies ter Borg-Neervoort November 2024

When Bart Neervoort left for Bandung for Batavia in September 1945 to see his wife and daughter he asked a friend to look after the villa Berg en Dal while he was away. This friend moved in half way September to enjoy a good rest in the beautiful villa and dahlia garden. Ursel went to have a look at the villa before she too left for Batavia on her way to Medan to join her husband. She spoke to an Indonesian man who spoke Dutch, head of the Berg en Dal staff. She explained that Mr Neervoort had left for Batavia where his wife was hospitalised, and that she would soon be leaving to join her husband in Medan. Her husband, Mr Frits and his brother Karl were not allowed into Java by the British. So there was nothing the family could do to protect Berg en Dal and its staff in these difficult times. She asked him and his colleagues to keep an eye on the beautiful villa.

This they did, they watched what was going on in the villa from a telescope across the road and from the garden surrounding the villa. They saw a Dutch military man² in and around the villa. (who according to Mountbatten's decree should not be in Java but had entered Bandung under the guise of a LOC/Rapwi). After breaking into several smaller houses, he talked himself into Berg en Dal. With his RAPWI scooter he took weapons to the Neervoort villa, and stored them in the house. Of course members Rapwi of help organizations are not allowed to carry weapons. This would cause a confusion leading to aggression against these humanitarian organizations. In fact all Dutch were forbidden to carry weapons by the British who feared a clash between the Dutch and the Indonesians. So our he military man breached two rules at once. The staff saw the Blanda military carrying weapons and dealing them out to his friends. They saw the military Blanda in front of Berg en Dal openly carrying weapons.

² The author is familiar with the name of this man, but because he became the accused in a criminal court case, his name is not mentioned here. This history is based on three witness reports of Dutch persons in the building at the time. A fourth witness report is by the Indonesian during the court case against the military man. This is in the hands of a Dutch former military man, Spencer Vos but he refused to make it public.



Calling himself Lieutenant he recognized no superior in command and did his own thing. After hearing about a pending attack he persuaded some 75 persons living in the area to seek refuge in Berg en Dal, which he considered an easily defensible location. At first glance one might doubt this.



The villa with its many windows, balconies, thin walls and outside staircase seemed exactly the opposite. The last place you would go to escape from shooting Indonesian youngsters.

The Neervoort friend taking care of the house did not agree to housing 80 persons and ordered the military man to send a third of them to a safe place, a nearby Swiss wooden building. Switzerland was neutral so that house was not under attack. In the meantime time our 'hero' was preparing the house for an assault. He did not barricade any windows or close the outside staircase. He placed a machine gun visibly on the balcony. It turned out to be useless, for getting there under enemy fire was too dangerous. A system of glaring lights was placed around the house. which lighted up the surroundings but not the house itself. A more effective way of provoking the Indonesian youngsters is difficult to imagine.

In the meantime the servants had asked the Neervoort friend taking care of the house permission to leave. Of course their payment would be continued by second in command under Neervoort, mr Dijkstra who lived in Bandoeng. The friend hoped these loyal servants would be on the watch-out for anything strange in and around the house. And report to Mr Dijkstra,

So the all the servants except the cook moved out. They were given their pay for several extra months and asked to come back as soon as things quietened down. They received some extra money for their families who were on the brink of starvation.

The servants wanted to concentrate on watching the building. They set up a telescope on the other side of the road. And some slept in the garden. So the moves of the Blanda were watched by the servants of Neervoort family. They even ventured near the building hiding in bushes. As Berg en Dal personnel they were of course allowed to do his. One of them was the gardener of the dahlia field.

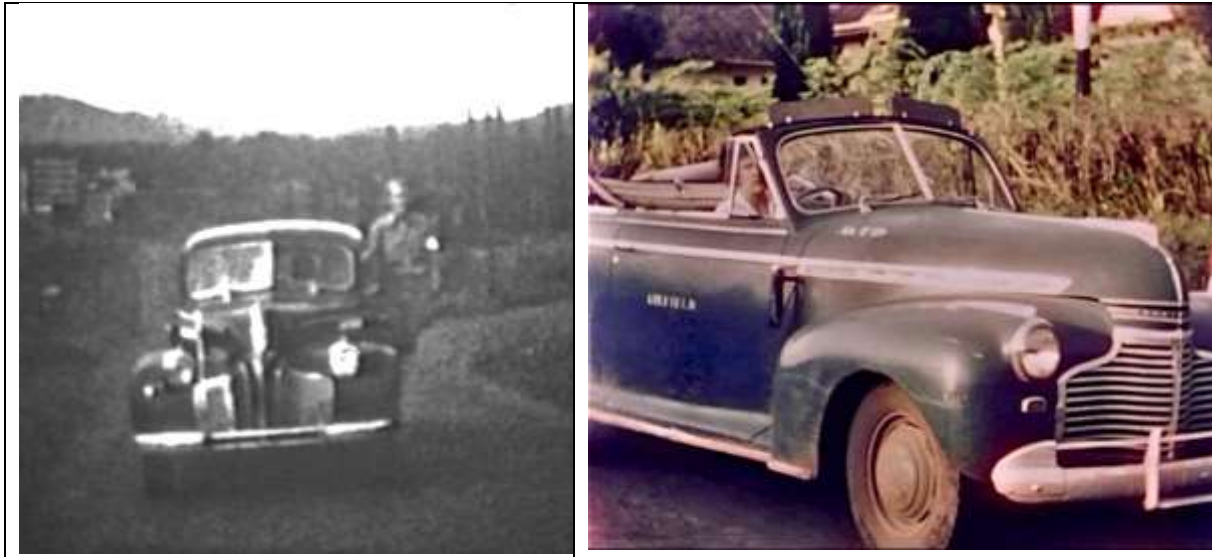
The Blanda in uniform led inspection tours of the grounds day and night. He rode round the grounds in a jeep with his gun. When he heard a sound in the bushes he shot.

Two of the Berg en Dal personnel were killed without the Blanda even noticing. They were immediately removed by a friend because Muslims must be buried within 24 hours. The survivor reported the killing to the head of the village who immediately came the next day with a policeman to evacuate the cook, the only Indonesian left in the building.

As the news spread, friends and family of the victims gathered. They wanted to throw that aggressive murderous Blanda, that criminal armed military man out the house of the beloved Neervoort family. The news spread by word of mouth. The machine gun and beamer on the roof did the rest. Some 40 Indonesian youngsters armed with bamboo spears and one or two machine guns gathered round the house. It was the armed Blanda and his armed mates, not the house that they wanted.

In the panic a young Blanda women went onto the stairs and was fatally wounded. An elderly Indonesian, head of staff, who ventured near the house to talk to the Dutch and hopefully achieve a ceasefire was shot in the leg with a Dutch bullet.

As the attacks grew in intensity the Dutch had luck. A group of Indian soldiers under British command, Gurka's lost their way, stumbling onto the situation around Berg en Dal. Their appearance scared the Indonesian boys who left the premises. Then the people in the villa were evacuated to safe havens. The military man and his friends continued their policy of breaking into smaller houses whose owners were still in the camps.



At a time when hardly anyone owned a car, they also rode around openly in cars, stolen from the garage of the resistance people, believing that the fact they had made the vehicles work again after not being used for some 3 years, made them their property. They took no notice of the demarcation line between north and South Bandung installed by the British. As a provocation they placed a machine gun placed ostensibly on the roof, and someone riding along on a side step board. So the so-called LOC/RAPWI lieutenant and his pals broke about every rule in and even outside the book.

VAM, the company of Bart Neervoort sued the Dutch army for crimes of this lieutenant enrolled by them. The VAM lawyer won the case and a damage compensation was paid by to VAM. It was used to help out the families of the deceased servants and compensate all other personnel who lost their job because the villa had become uninhabitable. The Dutch armed forces also compensated part of the damage done to the building. The perpetrator received a reprimand for his breach in military discipline. After a short while in prison, he spent the rest of the Dutch Indonesian war in a bombers squadron.

Because this man was suspected and tried for criminal offences. His name, known to the author, is not mentioned here. More details are available from Spencer Vos who is in possession of the report of the court case, but refuses to make it public.

The beautiful villa was very badly damaged. Window shattered. Ground floor burnt.



Bart managed to renovate the building with help from his friend from the oil company who had witnessed this disaster. But he had to hand over the property to that oil company for recreation of their staff. He never told his wife what had happened to their dream house.

The above was written by Marlies ter Borg-Neervoort in November 2024

Hello Bandung

After a while the British authorities saw no other possibilities than to expel the Indonesian militants from the North to south Bandung and

then from South Bandung as well. The local Indonesian in authority wanted to discuss this with his government in Batavia, but when he returned the British had already spread leaflets ordering the Indonesians to exit. Which not only the militants but many more of the Indonesian inhabitants did massively, meanwhile setting fire to large parts of Bandung north. Singing this song.

Hello Hello Bandung
The capital of Joy
Hello Hello Bandung
City of memories
It's been a long time
I didn't meet you.
Now it has become a sea of fire
Let's take it back brother.

Halo-halo Bandung
Ibukota periang
Halo-halo Bandung
Kota kenang-kenangan
Sudah lama beta
Tidak berjumpa dengan kau
Sekarang telah menjadi lautan api
Mari bung rebut kembali

Back to Melie in Batavia



Melie to Mien, 25th December 1945, Christmas Day, Tjideng camp, Batavia

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 ed.)

“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 18th 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 Frits and Karel since 1938 it must have been hard, with Frits in Medan, Karel in Balikpapan and both not allowed by the British command to come to Batavia ed.)

“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 18th 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 - Schlahmilch

“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 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 1st 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 Spoor, 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 20th 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 9th 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 23rd 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. 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 10th 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.

It was only on 22nd 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 26th British-Indian Division entered and occupied the city of Medan without much resistance. 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.

The Sultan himself survived The Sultan himself survived thanks to British protection as did the Maimoon palace.

There was more unrest. On 30th 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 9th May: "extremists are developing quite a lot of activity. Every night there are fights which cost lives."

On 29th 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
This is what an Indonesian site has to say.

"On December 1, 1945, 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."

In April 1946 Ursel went back to Batavia, from where she returned to Holland having been honorably dismissed from service on 27th May 1946.



What had happened? Ursel had great pain and it turned out to be an ectopic pregnancy. She had to be operated as soon as possible. When she was lying on the on the operating table all the staff, doctors and nurses fled, for an attack by armed Indonesian young men. Thank goodness the staff returned within hours and the operation was completed. On that basis she was honourably dismissed and allowed to go home via Batavia. Her husband was obliged to stay on.

But he was allowed as short leave, and the Ursel became pregnant again. This was NOT what the doctor had advised after her operation but..... she had her baby in Eindhoven her mother caring while her husband was in Indonesia...

With her toddler Anja and pregnant of Marliesje, she went to join Frits in Balkpapan and then Pladjoe. There I was born on 24th December 1948 in the middle of the Dutch war to prevent Indonesian Independence.



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. Pat, 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 recuperating from his imprisonment. His son André. Reunited with his parents after all those war years. Ursel with baby Anja often came to visit. Last but not least Wimpie, Melie's older sister who had come over from the USA.



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. Their 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 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 to amuse them with some song or game.



Back to Indië –Balikpapan and 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 Berg en 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 10th 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 31st 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

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.



In 2017 my son Berend ter Borg went back to Palembang to speak to the Indonesian veterans of this war. For me this was a moment of reconciliation



However the situation was still tense when Frits Neervoort left Balikpapan and returned to his beloved Pladjoe, -the Palembang oil compound, -in 1948; 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,” his wife Ursel remembered.



On the 24th 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 19th 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 8 months of my life more lives were lost than in the rest of the Indonesian war. In 1949 after the second police action of December 1948, more than 1000 Dutch military and KNIL were killed, and some 100.000 Indonesians, military and civilians; (compared to some 6000 Dutch military and KNIL

as against 150.000 Indonesians in the whole Dutch-Indonesian war. KNIL and the Dutch Army were two separate organizations fighting under the combined command of General Spoor.)

As a Dutch defence historian told me, in the Palembang area in 1949, "it was turbulent."

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. 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 7th December 1942, would be abolished. It was now 23rd September 1949



General Spoor

This Dutch military man, posthumously named General, was the military leader in the Dutch War against Indonesia. The majority of Dutch public opinion supported the military action in Indië, believing it was their duty to restore law and order and 'liberate' the Indonesian people from the threat of extremism. The colonial society which had been so beneficial, and had supposedly had the support of the Indonesian people, must be restored. There was some opposition here and there in Holland, but it did not impress.

The majority of Dutch media supported the military action as did the majority of politicians, headed by the Roman Catholic Prime Minister Beel, who came to power after the elections on 3 July 1946, remaining in power until 7th August 1948, after which he was appointed as the highest Dutch power in Indië, resorting under the Socialist Prime Minister Drees. Unlike his predecessor van Mook, Beel had hardly any knowledge of or experience in the Dutch colony. Obviously the majority of Dutch military supported the actions, including the masses of conscripts called to duty far away. They were commanded and indeed inspired by Simon Spoor.

We lost track of the Spoor family a little while ago. Let us resume. Annie and Vonnie were in the ADEK camp when Japan capitulated. André was in the Soekamiskin prison in Bandoeng, together with many other high officials, including H.J. Spit. Because Vonnie was nearly fatally ill, due to the fact that she had fed her mother the greater part of her own rations, she received priority in being repatriated. Obviously the fact that her father had a high official function before the war helped. All three returned to the Netherlands in the autumn of 1945. There they were overjoyed to see their son and brother André. After a short while both André's wanted to return to Indië.

André Spoor, the former Resident did not however want to remain in public service. He was outraged by the fact that acting Governor-General van Mook, who had spent the war safely in Australia and travelling the world over to enhance his influence, should sweep former officials, who had been imprisoned in Soekamiskin. The plans Spit had developed there with this once influential persons was waived away. These persons, judged van Mook, had lost touch with what had happened in Indië during their imprisonment. So disappointed with this Dutch infighting in a time of severe crisis, André Spoor had resigned from office. He wanted to give his energy to private business which was struggling to get on its feet again. He became



president of the Deli Planters Maatschappij, which he knew well from his time in Medan as assistant-Resident. His son also joined a private company in the Medan area, the Rubber Cultuur Maatschappij Amsterdam.

Simon Spoor had managed to escape to Australia with the very last plane leaving Bandoeng before the Japanese captured the airport. In Brisbane he worked for the Dutch military intelligence, of which he became the head in

As we saw, Simon Hendrik Spoor, a talented musician, chose a career in the Royal Dutch Colonial Army, Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger (KNIL) following in the footsteps of his mother's family. He made his way to become a

general, acting as **chief of staff** of the Dutch forces in Indië from 1946 to 1949.

When Simon H. Spoor became commander of the Dutch Army in Indië he had just turned 44. He was the youngest Dutch commander ever. He had always been brilliant. He passed as the best of his year at the Alkmaar cadet school and in the Royal Military Academy (KMA) in Breda. He arrived in Indië in 1924 as an ambitious 2nd lieutenant. He served in a variety of places including Bandoeng. In between he taught military strategy and tactics at the KMA and wrote a textbook. He was a confident and intellectual officer, perhaps a bit arrogant now and again.... Then on 7th December 1941 the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Indië was the first state to declare war. Two months later this war was over. The KNIL (Royal Dutch Indië Army) was humiliated, wiped out by an enemy who had been treated with ridicule. Spoor was devastated by the tremendous defeat. He escaped with the last, improvised flight to Australia. There he did everything he could to promote the liberation of Indië and its return to Dutch rule.

What drove Spoor, what was his mission? That was first of all to save Indië for the Netherlands. He was proud of the Dutch empire, of what it had given Indië: political unity, economic development, efficient just and honest government. He was sure that its population was grateful to the Dutch. However the prewar paternalist colonial rule must not return. A new relationship should come to be, in which Indonesians would participate to the full, but under Dutch leadership. Indonesia must remain part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Onwards together, that was

Spoor's motto. To realize this the self-appointed Nationalist 'leaders' fighting for an independent Republic of Indonesia had to be dealt a definite blow. The engineer Soekarno, the Leiden alumnus Hatta and teacher/ military leader **Soedirman** were, in Spoor's view, not the right people to represent Indonesia. Negotiating with them must be avoided. The TNI the 'Indonesian National Army' was in his view no more than a pack of terrorists, arsonists and murderers, who suppressed the Indonesian population. The Dutch goal must be to wipe away the 'Republic' and eliminate its leaders, and army, so that a political agreement could be reached with other, better representatives of the Indonesian people.

To this end Spoor developed a two pronged strategy.

One: a surprise massive attack on land, from sea and from the air with all available means to vanquish the TNI, to be called 'Police Action'

Two: a phase of 'pacification', the elimination of remaining local militants and gangs before after and in between Police Actions

Spoor never acted without a political mandate. He did however put heavy pressure on the governors Mook and Beel in Indië and on the cabinet in The Hague to cease the hopeless policy of negotiating with Soekarno and his band. It was impossible in his view, to reach an agreement with such unreliable men. Several times he even threatened to resign. He desperately wanted the politicians to give the Dutch army a chance to create conditions for a real solution. When the Lingadjatti agreement failed, (due also to obstruction in the Dutch Parliament) that chance was finally given. After building up his army so quickly against all odds, he could at last launch full scale attacks from sea, air and by land to recapture economic centres, necessary for the Dutch to finance the war. These full scale military attacks against an opponent of much lower military-technical potential were euphemistically called 'Politionele Acties,' Police Actions by Dutch politicians. This term would convince Dutch public opinion, that there was nothing wrong with simply 'restoring order'. International opinion would be urged to keep out of what was after all an internal struggle in the Dutch East Indies.

Spoor even pushed for and was granted the chance to capture Soekarno by invading Yogyakarta, to which the Indonesian leaders had fled.

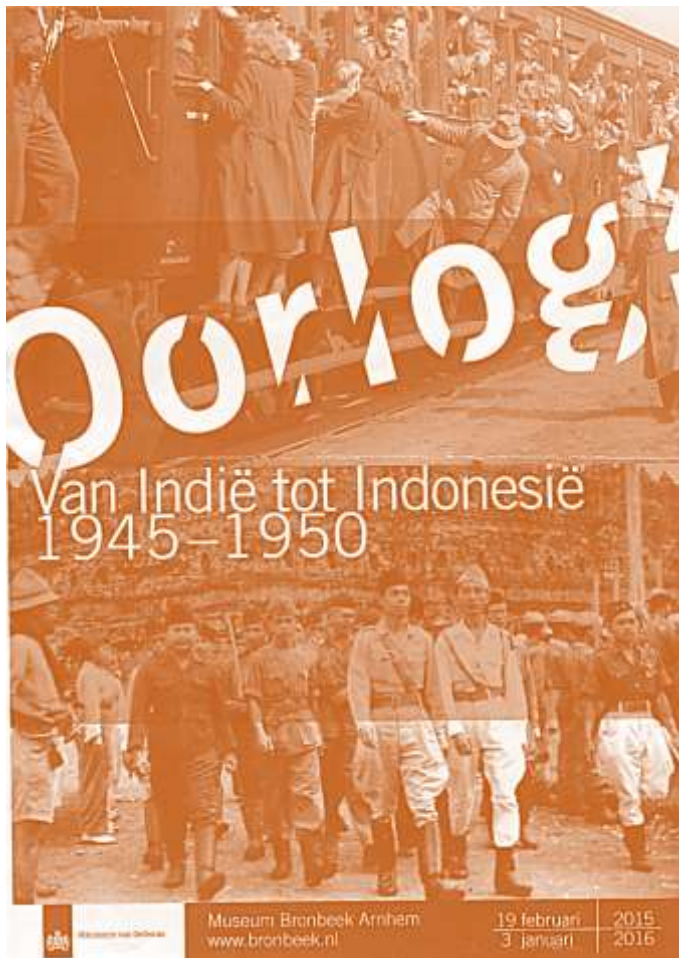
These actions however did not lead to the results Spoor had hoped for. Quite the opposite. The Dutch held the towns, but the TNI continued sustained guerilla warfare from the mountains, forests and kampongs. After the capture of Soekarno, the Indonesian position gained even more international support. When in the course of 1949 new negotiations got underway, it dawned on him that he had failed in his life's mission.

On the 10th May 1949 he wrote to his new, 3rd, wife, Mans Dijkema:

“I must confess I am broken and not recovered yet. The struggle with oneself, not to just throw it all down and get out; but on the other hand the possibility in still have of controlling the chaos, pulling out our soldiers, or at the very least, not deserting them, who cannot escape... ” Spoor-Dijkema p. 237

At that point General Spoor collapsed. He was totally exhausted. On the 25th May 1949, at the age of 47, Simon Spoor died of a heart attack. André Spoor was flown over from Sumatra, in time to say goodbye to his younger brother. His new wife was too late. She heard the news as she was waiting in for her flight in Amsterdam. She flew over from the Netherlands. An hour after her arrival the enormous funeral procession started. André Spoor and his son André represented the family. The General, who was loved so much by his men, had chosen to lie between them. He was buried amidst his soldiers in the Menteng Pulo, then still Batavia the centre of Indië, now Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia.





Spoor had started his career as an intelligent and intelligence man. He headed the Dutch intelligence unit in Australia. He spent a great deal of energy finding out the facts of the military situation. However his interpretation of the facts was incorrect. His interpretation, biased by his political views, led his search for facts. He had underestimated the power of Indonesian Nationalism. He had not reckoned with the capacity or the willpower of TNI to stage a systematic guerilla war. He had underestimated the perseverance of international opinion, which had been critical of Dutch policy from the start. He had overestimated the stamina of the internationally isolated Netherlands. He died a

tragic hero, who had tried to relive the glory of his forefathers in an age of decolonization.

General Spoor is still a controversial figure. Later generations of Dutch criticized Spoor for pushing ahead in spite of international criticism. He is said to have put undue pressure on Dutch political leaders, who of course carried the final responsibility in matters of war. He increased the pressure on them by threatening several times to resign. Of course he had his political allies, such as Prime Minister Beel, who succeeded van Mook as government leader of Indië.

Spoor did not understand the actual military-political situation. Dutch forces could master the cities with their superior forces, using American heavy weapons, financed with loans. However the scantily trained Dutch conscripts could not cope with guerilla warfare in the mountainous tropical forests. Imagine these blond lads, of 20 years old or less, who had never fought, never been in a jungle, never even been away from home. Through sheer incompetence their tactics became rather brutal, as we can see in the uneven casualties: 6200



troops on the Dutch side NL and KNIL; -against 150.000 Indonesians, military and civilians. Arguably some of these are due to internal strife on the Indonesian side.

The figures do show that even apart from the 'excesses' acknowledged by the Dutch government, this war was intense, not only during the so called 'Police actions' but before, in between and after them. As shown in the poster on the opposite page, the Dutch Ministry of Defence now acknowledges that fact that there was a war from 1945 to 1949, rather than just two isolated 'police actions.' Although he was backed by politicians, media and Dutch public opinion, this war was very much the responsibility of Simon Spoor



Recent criticism of Spoor goes even further. Spoor is accused of giving weapons to Indonesian Islamists and Communists to undermine the position of Soekarno. He supported war crimes of the infamous Westerling in Celebes. Thus as a military man he definitely went 'outside his little book' as the Dutch saying goes.

On the other hand, General Spoor was loved by his own men. He visited the wounded in hospital, an unlikely activity for an extremely busy general. He was the hero of Dutch war veterans, conscripts returning from an impossible war and receiving no praise at home.

Even Indonesian commanders could appreciate their opponent.

"General Spoor was a tremendous opponent for my husband during the war. But there was no hatred, just a lot of respect for the mutual talents. Both the Dutch and the Indonesians thought they fought a justified war. Your soldiers never did us personally something wrong, you always treated us respectable".

Widow of the former commander of the Indonesian Army

Abdul Nasution, Johanna Sunarti

"Spoor was a gentleman. Not one Indonesian officer would ever doubt that. In those days he called us agitators, boy scouts and footpads.³ But what do you want, it was war, we did things which weren't very noble."

Former rear-admiral Iman Sardjono

These statements show how readily Indonesians forgive. Perhaps that is a lesson to be learnt by us Dutch as we look back after 70 years. To forgive and ask forgiveness. Melie might say, its simply acting upon the Lord's prayer:

'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us. '

'Dan ampunilah kesalahan kami seperti kami juga mengampuni orang yang bersalah kepada kami.'

9. A Farewell to Indië

³ 'Footpad': low criminal going afoot as opposed to a highwayman, on horseback..

Literature: M. Spoor-Dijkema, Achteraf Kakelen De Kippen, herinneringen aan Generaal KNIL S.H. Spoor, legercommandant in Nederlands-Indie 30 januari 1946-25 mei 1949 , opgetekend door zijn weduwe, Uitgeverij De Bataafsche Leeuw, 2004

Jaap de Moor, Generaal Spoor - Triomf en tragiek van een legercommandant, Boom, Amsterdam, mei 2011,

Jaap de Moor, Wat dreef Generaal Spoor? What drove general Spoor?



Many if not most of the Dutch who had endured the 'Jappenkampen' and the Bersiap never went back. Anna Spoor remained in Holland because of the shattered health of her daughter Vonnie. She saw her son and husband return in 1947 determined to help rebuild the shattered country. Both went back to the Medan area where they had so many fond memories. André did not go back to a government position. He became president of the Deli Planters Association, closely linked to the Deli Tobacco Company. His son joined the Rubber Cultuur Maatschappij Amsterdam. Of course the hard currency to be earned by export of raw materials such as tobacco and rubber were essential not only for Indië but also for the rebuilding of the mother country. The military action 'Product' secured the harbor of Medan and the railways. On 31st July 1947 the KNIL did a 'round through Deli' 'rondrit door Deli', securing the favorite volcanic resort Brastagi, where a military post was installed.

The time was ripe for André and André to return and contribute to the economic rebuilding Indië. The country was in urgent need of Dutchmen who knew the ropes and could help the economy to start moving again. André was welcomed, he was well known and respected in the Medan/Deli region, where he had been assistant-resident in the thirties. Disappointed by the infighting in Dutch government circles, he did not join the the NICA, (The Netherlands Indies Civil Administration tasked with restoration of of Dutch colonial rule after the capitulation.) André preferred private business. As president of the Deli Planters Association, he could stay on after Indonesia became independent in December 1949. However the atmosphere was different. For the Indonesian authorities he was a former colonial ruler and the brother of the General who had plunged Indonesia into a protracted war, and had insulted the new leader Soekarno. André was even imprisoned, for dealing in weapons for the Deli plantation militia. After 5 days he was liberated through the influence of the Sultan of Deli, who argued that Spoor was one of the best Dutchmen in the country. However continual harassment and the plea of his wife in Holland, please come home, finally decided the issue. André Spoor bid Indonesia and the tobacco plantations farewell in 1950. In Holland he became director of the main cancer research hospital.



For their son André the situation was much more attractive. Conditions offered to attract young single Dutch males were excellent. If one had knowledge of the country and the Malay language like the young André did, it earned an extra bonus. So the young André returned to his beloved Deli region, with its volcano hikes near Brastagi, and the boating on the Toba Lake.



According to the young André, used to Nazi occupation, here in Medan, peace reigned. But there were a few incidents. The young men enjoyed riding in Jeeps without window screens. One young man had his head chopped off by a wire across the road at just the right



height. From then on the men were obliged to carry a badge with their name and blood group, just in case. There was also sabotage on the railroad from the rubber plantation to Medan harbor, supposedly secured by the KNIL. André is seen with sunglasses inspecting the damage. He managed to get alternative supplies of rubber from other plantations just in time for the ship back to Holland. Ships could no leave unless fully loaded to prevent trouble with instability at sea.



André was catching up for the long boring war years. For the fact that when he was old enough to join in the revels typical of student years, he had to stay indoors on the watch for Germans. André had just turned 20 when his part of the Netherlands was liberated.



Fortunately, being the only son André was not called up for military duty as his peers were. The boys born in 1925 were the first Dutch conscripts sent to Indie as the 7 December Division, named for the date upon which the Queen had promised that racial discrimination in Indië would end and the country gain substantially in independence. It was for this Dutch conscripts were supposedly sent to Indië.

Not André fortunately. His energy, talent and knowledge of the language went into economic rebuilding. It was essential that, after the years of Japanese occupation, the export of raw materials such as tobacco and palm oil was started up again. Thus hard currency could be earned which Indië and later Indonesia so desperately needed, to finance necessary imports. André loved his bachelor life in Indië, so he stayed long after the transfer of sovereignty to the Indonesians, from the Dutch queen, then Juliana, to Soekarno, on 27th December 1949. In the late fifties, the tide again turned and a wave of nationalization followed the new Dutch Indonesian confrontation about New Guinee.

Then finally, 1959, André left. Not for political or economic reasons, but because his friends with whom he had so much fun, were leaving the country.

With sorrow in his heart, André bid Indonesia farewell. He loved the country into old age.





The Neervoorts too 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 19th century. Bart explained that the Volker Company was using the most modern machinery instead of the forced labor, as in the 19th 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. She was diagnosed with cancer. But because of the taboo on this illness, she wasn't told. She believed she had heart problems. The cancer was fatal.

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 6th 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 Thierij had written:

And he (Moses) said unto Him,

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

Exodus 33 verse 15”

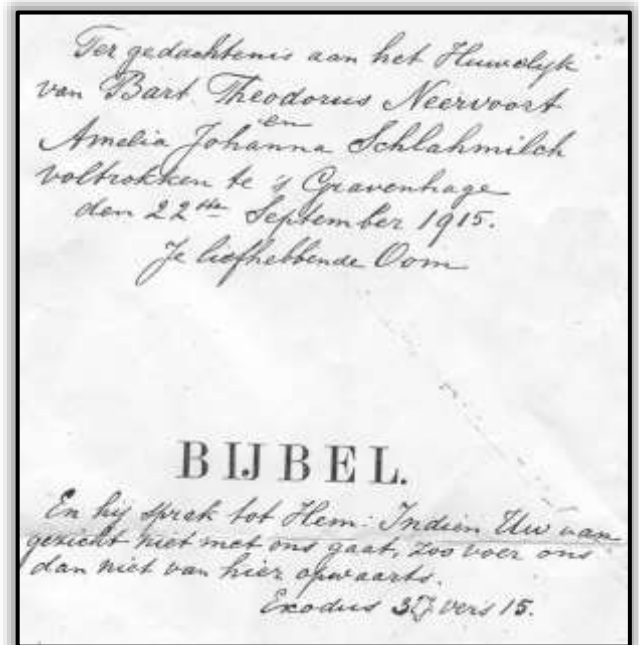
Well it seems to me, that His Presence was with my Oma, in Berg en Dal, in the high mountains of success and happiness as in deep dales of deprivation and death.

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 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. Bart keeps his drive for the business in spite of all the difficulties. He was working on a new contract for the new Indonesian government, a major roadway right through the jungle of Borneo. On 23rd July he went on a business trip to Indonesia, to obtain a hard currency deal for the personnel and machinery necessary to do this job.

"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. To the detriment of Dutch business that was trying to help rebuild the country, as was Bart with Volker.

“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

So it seems Bart was again true to his name NEER%VOORT. 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.

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 get worse.

Bart Theodore Neervoort died in the harness. At the age of 59.

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?

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

Wedding of Zus/Melie Neervoort & André Spoor



Wedding of André Spoor and Amelia, Melie,/ Zus Neervoort
in Hilversum 28 December 1960
at the town hall designed by the famous architect Dudok

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.

Portrait Gallery Schlahmilch - Neervoort



Left: Sophia
Schlahmilch van der
Stijl



FCH Schlahmilch



Amelia, Sophie
Johanna,
Wilhelmina



Johanna Maria
Neervort- Loucas



Amelia
Neervoort-
Schlahmilch



Bart Th. &
Frits (FCH)
Neervoort



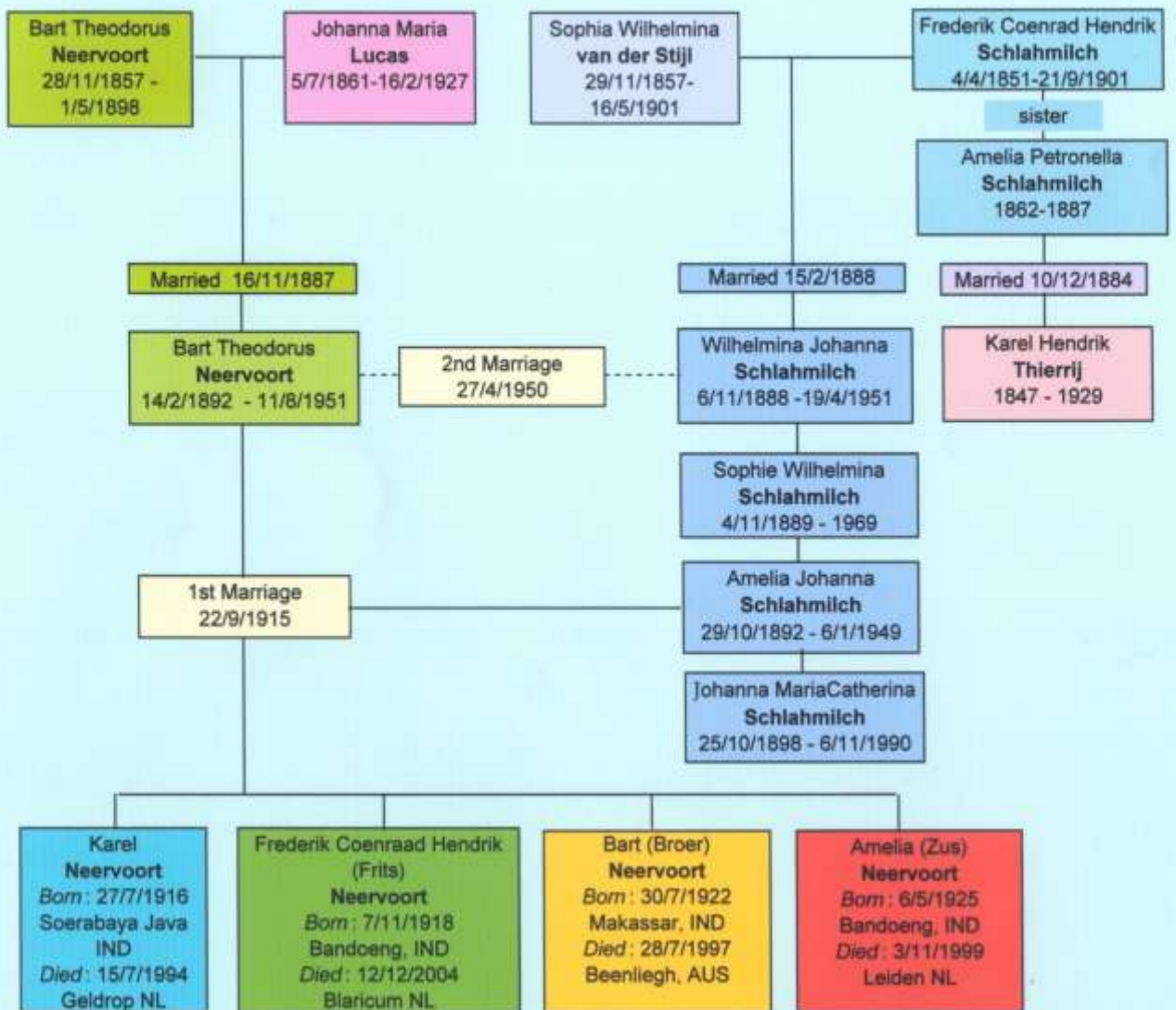
From left: Frits, Melie,
Zus, Bart Th. Broer &
Karel Neervoort



Bart Th. Neervoort & his
2nd wife Wilhelmina
Schlahmilch

Neervoort

Schlahmilch



Picture Gallery Poldervaart-Spoor



Right: Anna Maria Poldervaart- van der Stijl 1863-1938



André Spoor, 1867 - 1929
Father



André Simon Leonhardt Spoor, 1895 - 1981
son



Simon Hendrik Spoor, 1902 - 1949
son



André Leo Spoor
Born: 22/1/1925
grandson



André L.S. with Anna Maria Catherina Poldervaart, 1897 - 1991 ,
Yvonne Spoor, 1927-



André L.S. with Amelia Neervoort, 1925 - 1999



André L.S. Spoor, Amelia Neervoort
Married 1960