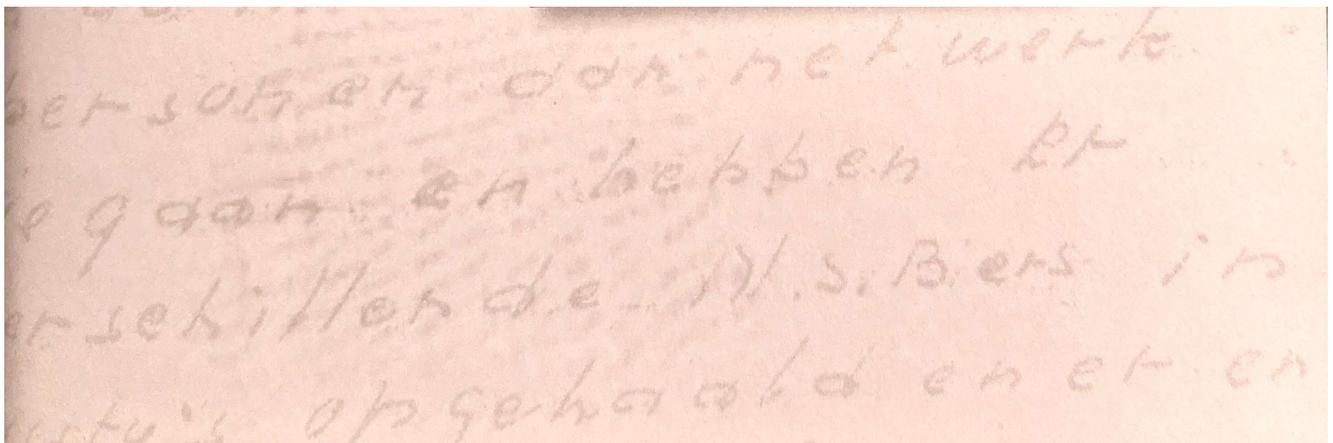


# ***The last weeks before the liberation in Herpt and surrounding area***

The war diary of Jan Durenkamp





View of Herpt, around 1938. Martien Coppens, Dutch Photo Museum.

## Preface

From September 4 to November 6, 1944 our father, J.H. (Jan) Durenkamp, kept a war diary. As assistant director of the dairy factory St. Isidorus in Herpt he lived in the period April 1944 to July 1947 in Herpt.

The diary covers the war period between the day of Mad Tuesday and the liberation of the south of the Netherlands. The meticulous way in which our father has written all the events gives a detailed picture of the day-to-day life of these last two months of war amid the frontline between Germans and Allies.

Much has been published about the war period in this area. We believe that this diary as an eyewitness report will be a gripping and recognizable addition to this. Now that we will commemorate the liberation of the south after 75 years at the end of 2019, it seemed to us a good time to make the diary of our father public and in this way to capture these memories for posterity.

And then you have to remember that an English translation of this diary is being worked on at the other side of the ocean. This our father would not have been able to conceive in the furthest distance....

Amsterdam, Theo Durenkamp  
Haarsteeg, Jan Durenkamp

*Theo Durenkamp, Jan Durenkamp and Sheila Beynen made this English translation in November 2023.*



Joannes Henricus (Jan) Durenkamp, around 1943  
*Collection: Durenkamp family*



St. Isidorus Dairy Factory with director's house, Herpt, October 1962.  
*Streekarchief Langstraat Heusden Altena, (SALHA) image Bank, WAA85670, Photographer J. de Bont, Waalwijk.*



Streetview with view on the dairy factory, Herpt, June 1971.  
*SALHA, Image Bank, WAA91480, photographer J. de Bont, Waalwijk.*

## Introduction

In November 2019 we celebrate that 75 years ago the municipality of Heusden was liberated from the German occupying forces. This book has been created for this occasion. The initiative began with the brothers Theo and Jan Durenkamp who in February met with the Regional Archives Langstraat Heusden Altena, in search of an organization that would have interest in the memories of their father Joannes Henricus (Jan) Durenkamp during the last war months in Herpt. It did not take much effort to convince the regional archives of the value of this authentic document about a short but poignant period in the history of the Second World War in the municipality of Heusden.

From Monday September 4 to Monday November 6, 1944 Jan Durenkamp made daily notes of what he experienced. Since April 1944 he was appointed as assistant director at the Cooperative dairy factory St Isidorus in Herpt. After Jan was employed by the Brabant Dairy Federation, which many dairy factories were part of, he worked prior to the transfer to Herpt at the dairies in Raalte and Teteringen.



*Newspaper report with the appointment of Jan Durenkamp as assistant director at the milk factory in Herpt.*

*SALHA, collection of newspapers, access 1203, inventory-number 54, Nieuwsblad for the land of Heusden and Altena, April 28, 1944.*

Translation of the newspaper report April 28, 1944:

**“Herpt.**

Last year the Cooperative Dairy factory "St. Isidorus" has received an honorary certificate from the Brabant Dairy Association in Breda because of the past 14-day butter inspections.

As this was the 40th certificate, it was awarded a special honorary certificate.

Mr. J.H. Durenkamp has been appointed as assistant director to the company, working in the same job at the Cooperative Dairy Factory at Princenhage (*a village near Breda*).

As operator was appointed Mr. G.A. v. Beukering, second engineer to the N.V. "Lacto" in Cuyck.”

In Herpt he had room and boarding at various addresses, among others with the family Slegers<sup>1</sup> who had a café opposite the factory and the Van den Broek family in the then Laagstraat, the current Burgemeester Buijsstraat.

Jan was born in Raalte on August 21, 1918. His parents were Dirk Hermanus Durenkamp and Petronella Johanna Catharina Albers. He was the fifth child and the third son. Due to the Spanish flu, a month after the birth of Jan his brother Herman (5 years old) and his sister Annie (not even 1.5 years old) died. Jan also got sick, but survived the flu. Afterwards, in the family Durenkamp still a daughter Annie (1920) and a son Herman (1922) were born. Father Durenkamp died on 8 November 1941, a year and a half after the start of the German occupation.

On Monday, September 4, 1944, the day before Mad Tuesday, the wildest rumours made the rounds and it seemed that the war would soon be over. That should have been a reason for Jan to take notes. In addition, later in the notes, it is clear that Jan also corresponded with the 'home front' in Raalte. The fact that the postal connections were at least uncertain during this period could also have been a reason why Jan decided to write his daily experiences consistently.

The impression is that Jan has worked out his notes shortly after the liberation in three books. The first book he also gave a title: "The last weeks before the liberation in Herpt and surrounding area". This explains that sometimes the chronology does not run completely synchronously with the indicated date. The most obvious example of this is the description of the consequences of the blowing up by the Germans of the town hall in Heusden on the night of November 4 to 5, 1944.

Unfortunately, the three original books were lost in a burglary in 2001.

Luckily there were already several copies of the originals in circulation, which have been preserved<sup>2</sup>.

The painstaking way in which Jan Durenkamp has noted all events gives a detailed picture of daily life during the last war months. Also of the uncertainty. What was true of the wandering rumors and what not? On September 12, for example, Jan writes: "Rumours are doing the rounds that Eindhoven has fallen". This liberation was forthcoming, but it would only be a fact on September 18. News about the situation closer to home is as a rule better, such as the blowing up of ammunition in Loon op Zand on September 5. Also interesting are the notes about the turmoil of the retreating German soldiers. More and more was stolen or had to be handed over. On October 11 Jan sighs: "Where is the end of the plundering". At the end of October 1944 the shelling begins. Life in shelters begins. Several buildings in Herpt get damaged or are destroyed, including six houses and farms in the immediate vicinity of the factory<sup>3</sup>. It is a miracle that the factory survived the war violence with only minimal damage.

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<sup>1</sup> Theodorus Slegers and his wife Catharina van Boxtel. Delpher.nl, Dutch National Gazette, May15, 1923 and Regional Archive Langstraat Heusden Altena (SALHA), Heusden, the archive of the civil registry of the municipalities under the Regional Archives Langstraat Heusden Altena, 1811-2003, Access 1025, inventory number 7056, ACT number 15. 26.

<sup>2</sup> A copy is recorded in Streekarchief Langstraat Heusden Altena. Collection of war documents, access 1250, inventory number 177.

<sup>3</sup> SALHA, Chris van Herpt Archive, 1970-1983, Access 0152, inventory number 11.

The diary ends on Monday November 6, 1944. That morning the first Allied soldiers of the 51st Highland Division will appear in Herpt and the German occupation ends.

Although Jan decided to stop his notes on the day of Liberation, the liberation unfortunately did not signify the end of the shelling and destruction. From November 1944 until the liberation of the Netherlands on May 5, 1945, the river Maas was the separation between the German and Allied armies. Parts of the Municipality of Heusden - the fortress itself, as well as Herpt and Hedikhuizen - were therefore on the front line. On New Year's Eve 1944, the local Polish commander issued the evacuation order.

The inhabitants of Herpt were housed in the vicinity (Drunen, Elshout, Haarsteeg) but also partly ended up in Udenhout, together with the pastor. A few people were allowed to stay behind to take care of the cattle<sup>4</sup>. After May 5, the population of Herpt returned to its battered place of residence and could begin the recovery. Jan will also have his work picked up at the factory again.

On July 1, 1947, Jan married with Johanna Catharina Maria (An) Van Beijnen, whom he had met in Herpt. The civil marriage took place in a school room in Heusden - the town hall was in ruins - for the (Roman Catholic) Church it was held in the St. Catharina's Church in Herpt that meanwhile had been recovered from war damage. The wedding was celebrated in Jan's former boarding house, Café Slegers. After his marriage, Jan moved from Herpt. After a short return to Raalte, he was in 1948 director of the Cooperative Dairy Factory in Kloosterzande, Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. In Zeeuws-Vlaanderen the sons Theo and Jan were born. Jan Durenkamp died on September 13, 1972, his wife An on March 12, 1993.



Jan Durenkamp and An van Beijnen after the completion of their marriage, together with Pastor Timmermans, July 1, 1947.  
*Collection Family Durenkamp.*

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<sup>4</sup> L. Sikkers, *From oppression to salvation. The Second World War between Drainage Canal and Maas. Personal experiences of people from Bokhoven, Drunen, Elshout, Engelen, Haarsteeg, Hedikhuizen, Herpt, Heusden, Nieuwkuijk and Vlijmen*. Part 2 (Vlijmen 2002), p. 21. L. van Meerendonck O. Praem, *Herpt on the church regarded. The ins and outs of a rural parish* (Nieuwkuijk 1993), p. 42.



Jan Durenkamp and An van Beijnen on their wedding day before the entrance to the Roman Catholic Church in Herpt, July 1, 1947.  
*Collection Family Durenkamp.*

## The Van Beijnen family

What is special to note is that in his diary, Jan mentions his future wife An Van Beijnen, without any idea that she will become his wife. On October 5, 1944 Jan writes: "In the afternoon, the Krauts\* come for the wagon because it has not been delivered. It is at the farmer's place just behind the factory. Two brothers and a sister live there. [...] The eldest boy is easily recognized by the Germans, because he has red hair." This relates to An and her brothers Bertus (with red hair) and Thé Van Beijnen. They lived in the farm of their uncle and aunt, Hubertus Joseph Luijben and Maria Margaretha Buijs. An and her eldest brother Nicolaas Hendrikus (Klaas) and Hubertus Theodorus (Bertus) had come to live on that farm after the death of their parents. Mother Bertha Petronella Verhoeven died in 1927 in childbirth at the birth of the youngest son Hendrikus Johannes (Driek). Father Johannes Van Beijnen died less than four months later. The youngest children Theodorus Cornelis (Thé) and Driek were placed with other family members. Driek died on February 11, 1928, only one year old, from meningitis. On October 5, 1944, when Jan writes about the "two brothers and a sister" Van Beijnen, their uncle and aunt Luijben both had previously died. Thé then joined An and Bertus to live on the farm.

\* "The Krauts" is a swear word for Germans. In Dutch the word *Mof* or (plural) *Moffen* is used. Where Jan uses the word *Moffen* it will be translated into *Krauts*.



*Nicolaas Hendrikus (Klaas) Van Beijnen*

Elder brother Klaas Van Beijnen lived on the farm since 1927, but was arrested by the Germans in early May 1943. This was related to the so-called milk strike. On April 29, 1943, it was announced that Dutch soldiers, who were initially allowed to return home after the May days of 1940, had to voluntarily report as prisoners of war. The reason for the call was to form a new group of workers in this way and to prevent the army from turning against Germany during a raid or invasion. Ultimately, approximately 10,000 men were taken prisoner of war. Many were hiding. The assignment caused a stir among the Dutch and was the direct reason for the national April-May strike, which started in Hengelo, but quickly expanded<sup>5</sup>.

The April-May strike is also called the milk strike. Farmers refused to deliver milk to the dairy factories, dumped thousands of liters of milk, or shared the milk for free. This also happened in the Langstraat. The German occupying forces strongly intervened throughout the Netherlands. On May 2, the chairman of the Farmers Union in Drunen was arrested and moved to Vught<sup>6</sup>. Frans Van Beijnen, a cousin of Klaas and president of the R.K.J.B. (Roman Catholic Young Farmersunion) in Haarsteeg, was also on the list, but managed to escape in time. Unfortunately, this did not apply to Klaas Van Beijnen, then president of the R.K.J.B. in Herpt<sup>7</sup>.

Klaas also ended up in Vught. He was released again, but because of the hardships suffered in Vught, he developed pleurisy and died on March 12, 1944 in the hospital in Den Bosch.

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<sup>5</sup> . L. de Jong, *The Kingdom of the Netherlands in the Second World War* (The Hague 1975) Part 6: July '43-May '43, second half, p. 765-776.

<sup>6</sup> F. Durant. *Drunen Elshout Occupied Liberated. War Memories of Inhabitants* (Helmond 1994), p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Sikkers, *From oppression to salvation. The Second World War between Drainage Canal and Maas*, part 2, p. 54.

## Explanation

The written notes of Jan Durenkamp were retyped verbatim by his son Theo. This typed document, together with the copy of the original, is kept at the Regional Archive Langstraat Heusden Altena<sup>8</sup>, formed the basis for this publication.

This release retains the spelling of the original document as much as possible, as well as the capitalization. Only here and there a change or addition has been made for the sake of readability. The same goes for grammatical improvements. Further, a few terms and events have been explained with footnotes.

Finally, Jan and Theo Durenkamp have provided additional information for this publication. This was used to clarify various notes from their father, but also formed an important basis for the introduction.

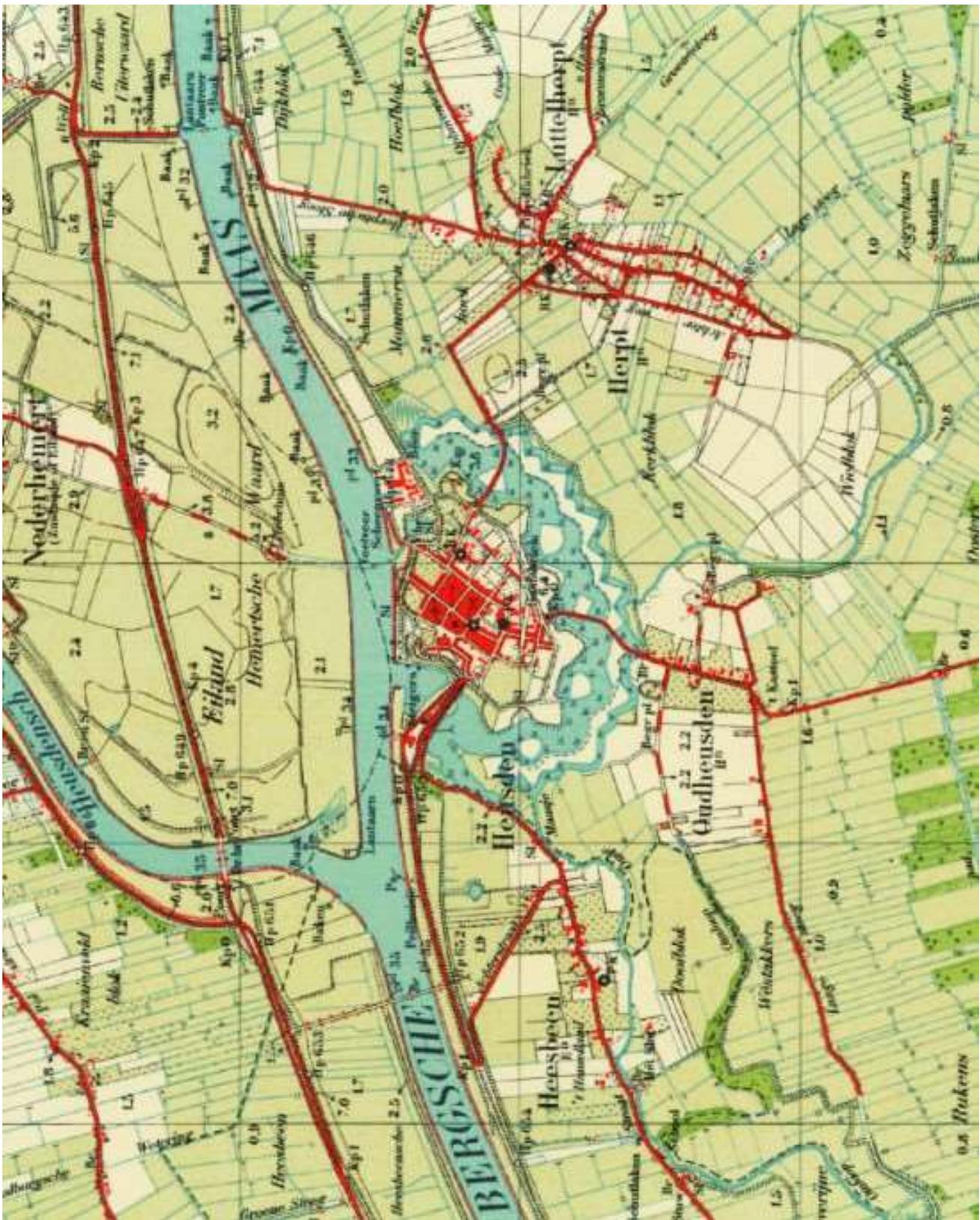
Mariska Heijmans-van Bruggen,  
Regional Archives Langstraat Heusden Altena



A cap intended for a bottle of buttermilk porridge originating from the Coöperative dairy factory Herpt. Regional Archives Langstraat Heusden Altena, the collection Varia 1545-2019, Access 0033, inventory number 378.

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<sup>8</sup> See note 2.



Map of Herpt and surrounding area. The dairy factory is also indicated here. Detail of sheet Nr. 44 F of the topographic map of the Netherlands, 1934. *Brabants Historical Information Centre, Access 343, collection of maps and drawings of the State Archives in North Brabant, Inv. Nr. 794.*

## ***The last weeks before the liberation in Herpt and surrounding area***

### **Sept. 4**

Here it is said with certainty that the allies have come to Tilburg with their shock troops. They are experiencing little opposition. This can also be assumed because the distance they cover in a few days is fantastic. The story is spreading through the neighbourhood like a wildfire. It is remarkable that there is little to hear or see of the violence of war here in Herpt.

In Heusden the residents live under high tension. The Mayor<sup>9</sup> was seen leaving in a luxury car, loaded with all his belongings and carrying his wife and child. It is said they went to Kevelaer. To everyone's surprise he is back on Monday evening, while in the afternoon the German-speaking authorities in the city had made known that they would take over the management of the municipality<sup>10</sup>. In the evening at about nine o'clock, the sky is a blaze of fire in a westerly direction. Propable big fires in Gilze-Rijen at the airfield. The next morning it turns out that it was Loon op Zand.

The English have advanced to Maastricht that day. The airfield at Venlo has been occupied by paratroopers. There is a lot of cheering after this great progress. Tomorrow we expect the Allied armies on the Maas and we will all sit under the age-old orange tree again (*orange is the national colour of the monarchy of Holland*). With this joyful thought, the municipality of Heusden, but certainly its subordinate settlement Herpt, goes to bed with peace of mind.

### **Sept. 5 <sup>11</sup>**

At 1:55 a.m. I am roused from a deep sleep by heavy hum that rattles windows and doors and makes the bed make a quickstep<sup>12</sup>. Quickly with my head out of the window, I looked and saw the same blaze in westerly direction that we had seen in the evening. This music has continued the entire night.

In the morning at the dairy factory it is known that there are troops in front of Breda and not in Tilburg.

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<sup>9</sup> NSB Mayor A. M. G Thomaes was installed in Heusden on 9 May 1942. P.H. Winkelman, *Heusden ravished and liberated* (The Hague 1950), p. 20 (*NSB: Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging, the fascist political movement in the Netherlands*).

<sup>10</sup> As far as is known, Thomaes himself departed late in the evening of Monday September 4. The rest of the family had already departed earlier in the day. The destination was Kevelaer. Winkelman, *Heusden ravished and liberated*, p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> Mad Tuesday. Influenced by rumors, the liberation seemed to be near, because in the preceding days the Allies had made great ground gains and liberated Brussels and Antwerp. Also the German occupying forces took the rumors seriously. Many NSB-members (*NSB was a Dutch political party that collaborated with the Germans*) fled and in haste, administrations and ammunition were destroyed in various places.

<sup>12</sup> Jan, from his appointment in July 1944, had room and boarding at various addresses, among others with the family Slegers who had a café opposite the factory and the Van Den Broek family in the then Laagstraat, the current Burgemeester Buijsstraat (*street names*).

At 8:30 terrible booms from the ammunition depots at Loon op Zand<sup>13</sup>, blown up by the (*retreating*) German soldiers.

We are all picking at our ears. The great air pressure causes itching of our eardrums.

Have the English-Americans already made further progress in the direction of the Moerdijk? Rotterdam? Occupied by paratroopers and from the sea!!

South of Waalwijk, the English are already there! In the afternoon, people in Waalwijk took action and picked up in cars several members of the NSB-party and shot some of them<sup>14</sup>.

The whole of Waalwijk present itself dressed in orange. The people are crazy with joy.

However, they have been a day early (*the people in Waalwijk thought the liberation had come but they celebrated it a little too early*).

The last trucks in the municipality here have received the message to serve the German war effort. But they also absconded with drivers-owners for the sake of the homeland. Our mayor has abandoned the sinking ship on Sept. 5 to 6 with unknown destination. Also other members of the NSB-party are no longer considered inhabitants of the municipality Heusden. The Krauts pass by here at night in highly camouflaged cars. In the evening after eight o'clock it is forbidden to be outside.

## Sept. 6

In Den Bosch a part of the cattle market is on fire. The Machine factory Grasso and (monastery) Mariënborg. All German shelters.

Houses abandoned by the German maids are looted. A few civilians were killed by the Germans who came to restore order.

In Vlijmen some civilians were killed because the Germans shot at gatherings<sup>15</sup>.

In Waalwijk, the Germans gave the opportunity to bring back the disappeared NSB-members within an hour. Result nil. Then they claim the perpetrators to show up within an hour. If they do not show up, some civilians will be shot. Another negative result. The mayor stands with a few more men - the Hoffmans brothers - at the doors of the Town Hall waiting to see whether the perpetrators will appear. If not, they will have to pay for these partisans who thought that on Sept. 6 their day had already arrived. The result is that all these people get the bullet behind the town hall. The pastor was present at the time, but he turned his face away during the shooting.

One of the victims is only half hit and not killed. He may yet be rescued. He is now in hospital in Den Bosch<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> The MAST (Munitions Ausgabe Stelle) between Loon op Zand and Kaatsheuvel was, during the Second World War, a large ammunition depot of the Germans. J. Didden and M. Swarts, *Provincial Town in Wartime. Waalwijk and Surrounding Area 1939-1944* (Waalwijk 1991), p. 166.

<sup>14</sup> In Sprang-Capelle and Waalwijk, about twelve NSB-members and Landguards were arrested that day by the resistance and detained. As far as known one of them was shot during an escape attempt. *J. Didden and M. Swarts, Provincial Town in Wartime*, p. 166-167.

<sup>15</sup> At Café Boom, retreating German soldiers shot at civilians Three people were killed. *Met Gansen Trou 5* (1955), Number 5 "Vlijmen - Nieuwkuijk - Haarsteeg", 89-96, there p. 90.

<sup>16</sup> 16 Mayor E.C.J. Moonen and the brothers Joop and Vincent Hoffmans were executed by Dutch SS soldiers on September 6, 1944 when two Landwachters (*those put in place by the Germans to protect the NSB*), the previous day captured by the resistance, were not released. Pastor H.F. Heezemans was present. Vincent was severely wounded, but miraculously survived the execution. J. Didden and M. Swarts, *Provincial Town in Wartime*, p. 168-174.

Because the cars are requisitioned by the Germans, all transport quickly came to a standstill. Herpt's excess milk is not collected on Sept. 5 and 6. On Sept. 7, farmers will receive 100% skimmed milk<sup>17</sup> back.



The Town Hall Square in Waalwijk with the Town Hall, where on September 6, 1944 the execution of Mayor Moonen and the brothers Hoffmans took place.

*Regional Archives Langstraat Heusden Altena, Image Bank, HSDO1326, photographer J. de Bont, Waalwijk.*

## Sept. 7

At eight o'clock in the morning, three Kraut soldiers suddenly appear at the milkreception of the dairy factory. Apparently they are sheltering from the pouring rain, which makes everything outside shine. We pay no attention to them at all and regard them all as air.

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<sup>17</sup> Skimmed milk is the milk that is left over after the cream is removed. The cream is used to make butter. Source: Wikipedia, lemma Taptemelk.

Fifteen minutes later a transport of German cars and horse-drawn carriages<sup>18</sup> arrives from Vlijmen to Heusden.

We soon drop the shutters, as if the place is closed. We have a good supply of butter that cannot be transported and we know that on their return journey they will take what they deem necessary. Behind the shutters we could see the great journey. They also had a colt standing on the wagon and a fat pig, otherwise no problems occurred with them.

In the afternoon about ten fighter planes fly over and continue to circle above Den Bosch. Suddenly the anti-aircraft gun starts barking. However, without visible results.

In the afternoon at an around 6 pm four cars pass by.

This is the result of an ultimatum to the mayor of Wijk<sup>19</sup>. He had to guarantee with his life that the hiding cars with its chauffeurs would show up at four o'clock in the afternoon to serve driving for the German army.

In the evening, the pastor of Herpt<sup>20</sup> received a visit of a Franciscan father. To be honest, he had left his bike against the hedge in the street. Three German soldiers pass by on bicycles. One of them gets off and exchanges his bicycle, with a loose front wheel and a piece of rope to hold the inner tube in place, for the better one of the father without his permission, much to the chagrin of Pastor Bonus<sup>21</sup>.

## Sept. 8

It has been remarkably quiet since Tuesday afternoon. And we have reconciled ourselves to the idea of having to remain under the German yoke, internally however with the secret hope that this will only be a matter of a few days.

Yet we cannot believe that this did not become a reality on Tuesday morning. If the Allies had actually arrived with thousands of soldiers, North Brabant would have fallen into their hands without a fight. Zaltbommel<sup>22</sup> has now been evacuated and is now being reinforced by the German army. In the afternoon at 3 o'clock everything had to be out.

This afternoon, Germans arrived at the shipyard in Heusden and demanded that a team of 30 men to go to work at the shipyard in Zaltbommel on some ships that the German army still thinks they need.

## Sept. 9

In Heusden they ran a minesweeper aground near the swing bridge, because they thought this ship would not make it back to Germany<sup>23</sup>. At the end of April she was launched from the shipyard in Heusden, after working on it hundreds of hours longer than budgeted. Even when

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<sup>18</sup> Vehicles pulled by horses.

<sup>19</sup> Mr C.J.B. Landweer. SALHA, the archives of the Municipality Council of Wijk and Aalburg, (1906) 1934 – 1972 (1986), Access 0016, inventory number 551.

<sup>20</sup> Pastor W.L.A.M. Timmermans. L. van Meerendonck O. Praem, *Herpt on the church regarded*, p. 34.

<sup>21</sup> Good Shepherd.

<sup>22</sup> Zaltbommel is the only place in the Netherlands that was evacuated on the day after Mad Tuesday, September 6, 1944, on the orders of the German occupier. The reason for the evacuation has never been completely clarified. <https://mijngelderland.nl/inhoud/verhalen/evacuatie-van-zaltbommel>.

<sup>23</sup> This concerned the swing bridge over the Heusden canal. The ship ran aground just the bridge because of sabotage, but also because of its depth. J.M. van Alphen and J. van Heemskerk, *Aalburg in wartime* (Heusden 1984), p. 41.

she was launched and had to be laid up<sup>24</sup>, business continued as usual. They can also take good use of the material assigned for this. So the workers take what they think they need with them and in this way they get the materials and stuff.

### **Sept. 10**

All week the English aircraft carried out reconnaissance flights over Brabant. Here the goal was always Zaltbommel where the Germans are making reinforcements. This afternoon at 2 o'clock they fly around Herpt and shoot at the train near Drunen. There's a car coming through Herpt that they bring it under machinegun fire outside the village. They shoot a passerby on a bicycle through his trouser leg. Those pants are getting expensive. Troop transports were shot at near Helvoirt. At 5:00 p.m., a lot of planes in the air and again at 8:00 p.m. The anti-aircraft guns in Hedel and Zaltbommel are doing their utmost. But no results.

### **Sept. 11**

It's fighters and bombers in the air all day long. At about 10 a.m., the anti-aircraft guns come into action. At half past one in the afternoon we hear again machinegun fire at trains and we see dive airplanes. It is the wild west here and from that distance it is a beautiful show to see. It really is first-class. All transport has been stopped. The milk still comes to the factory. But the St. Jan<sup>25</sup> from Den Bosch leaves us again with 3,500 liters of milk and 1,500 liters of skimmed milk<sup>26</sup>. The telephone connection is broken again. Different problems every day. At 6 p.m., hundreds of four-engine bombers fly over here and at 7 p.m. we see them return again. It is suspected that the Siegfried Line Westwall<sup>27</sup> will be bombed.

It is said that the English have crossed the border south of Eindhoven. Further details are still lacking.

Here in the municipality, 80 people have to go to the Maas bridge in Heusden tomorrow morning, also to dig. What should that be! Maybe they too will become people in hiding. We will hear more about it tomorrow.

It's 8 o'clock. We feel the German pressure heavily on our shoulders every day. Despite the nice weather, we have to stay indoors. But there is hope that it could be just a matter of a few days. This is what makes us hopeful.

### **Sept. 12**

It's a beautiful day. The sun shines in a cloudless sky. It is ideal flying weather. The allied air fleet has been in action all day. We hope that this will not be the case tomorrow. In the end you get a headache and your ears start ringing from the loud drone. From 10 a.m. until 10 p.m. it went up and down to Germany. Also in the morning from 2 a.m. to 6 a.m. It's

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<sup>24</sup> It is likely that the same is referred to as "anchored" in the text section of 2nd of October. See also note 40.

<sup>25</sup> The milk factory St. Jan on the Koningsweg ("Kingsroad") in 's-Hertogenbosch.

<sup>26</sup> Same as undermilk, see note 17.

<sup>27</sup> The Westwall was a German defensive line built just before and during World War II. By the Allies, this line was invariably called Siegfried Line. The line ran from Kleef to the Swiss border over a length of 630 km. Source: Wikipedia, lemma Westwall.

maddening all that noise. They are also shooting at cars, trains, and ships again. Yesterday the Germans seized the last tanker truck from the St. Jan dairy factory in Den Bosch. They will now have to do practically without it, because it has to be brought in from outside. No one likes it. Either the driver or the car is in hiding.

We are still in suspense here because the bridge in Heusden could be blown up at any moment. The Krauts will do better than the Dutch soldiers in '40. The pillars are loaded. And on the bridge and in the arch hang four torpedoes - each 1 1/2 meters long - 30-40 cm in diameter, all connected by an electrical cable. The whole thing will completely go up into the air.

Everywhere the windows and doors are loose. Heesbeen has been evacuated. In the distance we hear heavy artillery. Rumors are circulating that Eindhoven has fallen. No confirmation can yet be obtained. Since last week we have been a bit less expeditious in terms of advancing on Dutch territory.

### **Sept. 13**

Today the activity in the air that we are gradually becoming accustomed to is happening again. Once again it concerns reconnaissance flights and fighter planes attacking individual targets, such as a ship in the Maas River near Veen. It would have been just right for Uncle Toon<sup>28</sup>, he would have come home with a good catch of fish because they were floating in the water intoxicated by the noise of the onboard cannons.

In the afternoon from 6 to 7, several hundred bombers flew over and back again. At 8 o'clock, ammunition depots were blown up again in Loon op Zand. The air pressure is very strong. The tobacco plants sheltered behind the house sway back and forth, such a tremendous air movement.

### **Sept. 14**

Harry's<sup>29</sup> birthday. Still no postal service. So, congratulations this way. Congratulations to Mama, brother, sisters, uncle, and aunt too. Today is exceptionally quiet. Only a few airplanes. The weather is good. It's like a warm summer day. But not ideal for flying. The air is thick, there's a layer of clouds.

As there are no other acts of war to be seen for us except from the air, this day is perhaps the calmest we have experienced so far.

### **Sept. 15**

Happy to see mail this morning. The letter has been on its way for four days. Unfortunately, I had to read that you had your birthday, Anni<sup>30</sup>. Congratulations anyway, and to the rest too. It was September 9th!

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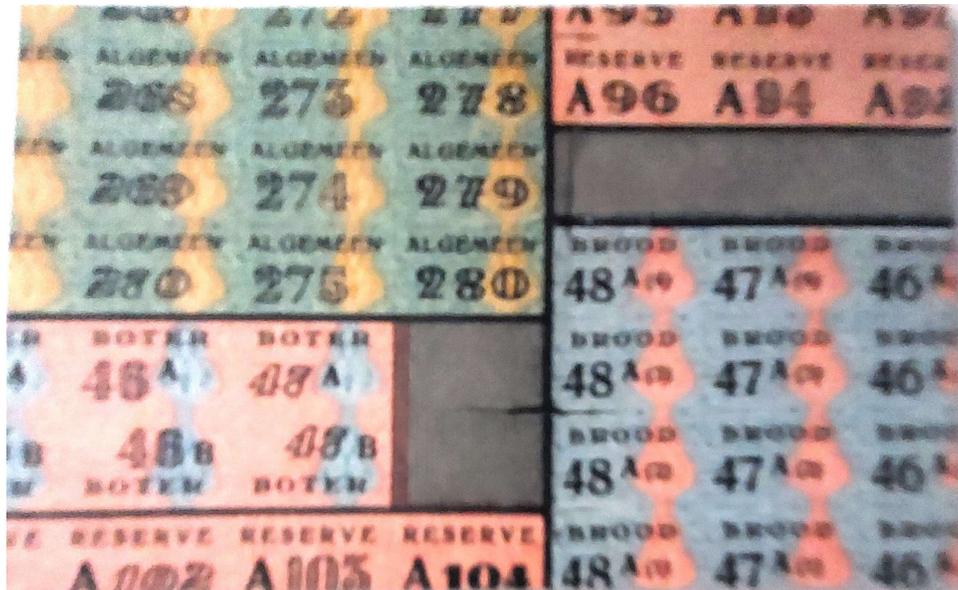
<sup>28</sup> This would concern Toon Buijs who had a farm opposite the milk factory in Herpt. He was called 'Uncle Toon' in the vernacular. Source: interview with Driena van Beijnen, dated June 24, 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Henricus Gerardus Antonius (Harry) Durenkamp (14-09-1914 / 5-02-1984). Jan's eldest brother.

<sup>30</sup> Joanna Catharina Maria (Anni) Akkermans-Durenkamp (9-9-1920). Jan's youngest sister.

Few airplanes today. It was misty until 1 p.m., then low clouds through which the sun could hardly shine. Poor visibility. Tonight, a few fighters fly over at half past seven, and we can hear bombs falling in the distance. Also another very heavy explosion boom near Loon op Zand.

New food ration coupons have been distributed today<sup>31</sup>. The coupons are provided with the distribution district number and are only valid in that district. Furthermore, the ration coupons have been temporarily blocked, while butter may be delivered on the margarine coupon. This morning's letter did not mention whether my letter, dated September 6 and sent on September 5, had already arrived in Raalte<sup>32</sup>.



Distribution coupons, among other things, for butter and bread. Regional Archive Langstraat Heusden Altena, the collection of War Documents 1936-2015, access number 1250, inventory number 89.

## Sept. 16

Now there are many airplanes coming to do reconnaissance flights. Troop movements are going on towards the Dutch border and we expect something to happen any day now. At half past 10 in the evening, a fighter plane provided a grand display of fireworks by firing off flares. It took about ten minutes. It's a shame that almost no one in Herpt has seen it.

<sup>31</sup> To distribute scarce food and goods more fairly, they were only obtainable with a coupon system. The government provided these distribution coupons. The implementation was in the hands of distribution services and districts. The municipality of Heusden fell under the Waalwijk distribution district. SALHA, archives of the Food Industry and Distribution District Waalwijk, 1916-1919, 1939-1952, access 1097, introduction.

<sup>32</sup> Jan's parental home was in Raalte.

## Sept. 17

This morning at 10 o'clock, we went to the high mass in Hedikhuizen. Heavy bombers flew overhead along the way. After church there were about seven fighters flying around, passing us each time and firing their guns. We could see it all so clearly. It's indescribable. In the afternoon after dinner, airplanes pass by. Hundreds and hundreds, and there were gliders too. I estimate between two and three thousand. We have been counting them. Eventually you give up because it just keeps going. After an hour, the first ones return, while the second half still has to come. They return along the same route. You now see two streams flying towards each other<sup>33</sup>. Oh, it's too bad that you can't see any of this yet. It's half past six and it is known that paratroopers have been dropped in Schijndel, Son (near Eindhoven). Also in Arnhem, Nijmegen, Tilburg, but is this true! Time will tell. The resistance has officially announced that they can start work south of the Lek river. We regret that no paratroopers landed at the Heusden bridge. We are only one kilometer away from that. In the evening they continue to fly, in the direction of Tilburg it remains very bright all evening with an occasional flicker. We cannot figure out what it is. Tonight I quickly put a note in the mail, because I heard that a train would still run on Monday morning.

## Sept. 18

It's Monday morning and I'm not in the mood to go to work too early. Fighter planes and fighter jets are already flying and conduct reconnaissance flights. It is always towards Zaltbommel, Hedel, Den Bosch and south of there. In the afternoon, at half past one, tremendous booms. The house shakes and it comes from the direction of Den Bosch. We suspect that bridges are being blown up<sup>34</sup>. There is still a coming and going of airplanes all day long. At 4 o'clock, the large procession of gliders pulled by airplanes starts again, but now a little further away and lower than yesterday. According to estimates, there are even more now than yesterday. We are amazed where they come from. It's unbelievable. At 6 o'clock, the fighter planes fly over here again so low. You can clearly recognize the distinguishing features. We are glad that it's evening and that the roar of engines will be disappear for a few hours. It can get really make you sick after a while. It's now some distant rumbling. Probably heavy artillery. This afternoon, a German column was shot at in Hedel. The planes went wild and kept coming back. They were able to set fire to three cars on the road bridge over the Maas. The drivers jump from the bridge into the river.

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<sup>33</sup> Jan witnesses the start of Operation Market Garden, an Allied offensive against the Germans. The operation consisted of a large-scale airborne operation (Market) and a ground offensive from Belgium (Garden). On September 17th, the first British, Polish and American airborne troops were dropped around Eindhoven, Nijmegen and Arnhem to capture important bridges over Dutch rivers. Source: Wikipedia, Operation Market Garden.

<sup>34</sup> In 's-Hertogenbosch, the Germans destroyed the railway bridge, the railway station and locomotives after the start of Operation Market Garden.

<https://www.erfgoedshertogenbosch.nl/verhalen/de-bevrijding-van-s-hertogenbosch>.

## Sept. 19

It was extremely quiet last night.

This morning at 10 o'clock, retreating Germans pass through Herpt. It's a disorderly mob. Everyone trudges and lugs along the road on their own. They take the bicycles they come across. There is still a Kraut behind the factory, but I just secured the bicycles, so too bad. Don't suppose they don't want a bicycle with hard tires, because the Krauts who pass by now are riding on pneumatic tires, hard tires, wooden tires and there's one who's riding on the rim, so without a tire on his front wheel. They literally have nothing left. The little they still have is all property of someone else. Just outside Heusden, they steal a bike with wooden tires from an old man.

This afternoon, about ten Germans departed who deserted. They had come to farmers at night to stay, and [the farmers] did not dare to refuse. After a few days, the cat was out of the bag. They tell it themselves. They too hoped for the end! Because they cannot keep it up. They come from Normandy and are now moving from village to village.

This afternoon, they picked up two deserters who wanted to cross the Maas at the Heusden bridge. They threw a few hand grenades through the boat, which is privately owned.

From 4 to 6 o'clock many planes flew over again but were difficult to see. It is beautiful weather. The sun is shining, but in a hazy blue sky covering the airplanes.

Gatherings of three or more persons are now prohibited. The Germans have confiscated butter from the dairy factory in Heusden<sup>35</sup>. We have now stored our stocks in a more secure place.

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<sup>35</sup> The dairy factory 'De Bommelerwaard', also known as V.Z. (United Dairy Processors). The factory was located next to the canning factory, on the side of the Wijkse Poort. SALHA. Newspaper Collection, Access 1203, Inventory Number 56, *News for the Land of Heusden and Altena, the Langstraat and the Bommelerwaard*, October 20, 1949.

# *Gemeente Vlijmen.*

De Burgemeester van Vlijmen maakt nogmaals bekend,  
dat het verboden is met meer dan 5 personen zich in de  
open lucht op te houden.

Voor de laatste maal wordt U gewaarschuwd, door de  
politie zal zonder vooraf gaande waarschuwing direct  
strengere maatregelen worden genomen.

Vlijmen, 19 Sept. 1944

ZIET HET VOCHT.

## *Municipality Vlijmen*

*The mayor of Vlijmen announces again that it is prohibited to meet in public in groups of more than 5 people.*

*For the last time, you have been warned, the police will take strict action without notice.*

*Vlijmen, 19 September 1944. SPREAD THE WORD.*

Announcement by the mayor of Vlijmen on September 19, 1944 that gatherings are prohibited. The date of the announcement is exactly the same as the date of Jan's note. This announcement probably also applied to neighboring municipalities of the Heusden municipality.

*Regional Archives Langstraat Heusden Altena, the Archives of the municipality of Vlijmen (1907)1920-1948(1950), Access 0243, inventory number 313.*

## **Sept. 20**

Today it is very quiet. It appears that there was no air transport along this route. There were only some spitfires and fighter planes.

## Sept. 21

In Haarsteeg, the Germans confiscated horses, wagons and horse equipment, etc. in the afternoon. Everything goes to Den Bosch. It is going to be a run into the fields of farmers with their equipment, but there are casualties.

Herpt has been warned and is taking precautions. A troop of Germans is on its way. We put our bikes away. Fortunately, they do not stop and move on to Heusden.

## Sept. 22

This morning there is no milk from Haarsteeg and Hedikhuizen. Everything remains hidden. They take another farmer with horse and wagon.

We receive a telephone call that the Germans are coming to demand butter. We are just pressing the butter. We quickly hide the butter in every nook and cranny, except for a few kilos. Luckily, they do not show up. The day has passed uneventfully. The actual combat actions are still not visible. These are still east of Den Bosch.

Nails are thrown on the street in Heusden. They pick up one person and put him on the Maas bridge. The dogs aim their guns to shoot him. Fortunately this does not happen. It is frightening. Now some people have to sweep the roadway clean.

The mayor<sup>36</sup>, Adriaan de Haan, tells the public that everyone has to ensure that no nails are left on the street in front of their houses.

## Sept. 23

This morning there was quite a lot of shooting towards Den Bosch. The station was made unusable. In the afternoon, around 4 o'clock, many planes flew over with paratroopers and gliders.

The milk deliverers from Haarsteeg, Hedikhuizen, and also from Heusden did not show up today. No churning<sup>37</sup> today It's not worth it.

The shopkeepers now need an additional permit from the branch manager in the Waalwijk distribution district to be able to buy their butter beyond their allocation. It's becoming hopeless for these people. Hardly anyone dares to cycle anymore, and now they have to go to Waalwijk for a permit for each purchase. We are not allowed to deliver without this mandate. Evacuees from Kerkdriel and Velddriel in the Bommelerwaard arrived<sup>38</sup>. Some Germans were killed by the resistance there, resulting in evacuation as punishment. They are now housed here with different farmers.

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<sup>36</sup> After the departure of the NSB mayor Thomaes, Mr. Adriaan de Haan took over as deputy mayor. Winkelman, *Heusden besieged and liberated*, p. 26.

<sup>37</sup> After the cream is separated from the milk with a centrifuge, it is churned to separate the remaining moisture from the cream. The products that remain are butter grains and buttermilk. S. van Hulten, *Good Butter: A Life in Service of the Farmers* (St. Michielsgestel 2014). p. 66.

<sup>38</sup> In September and October, the villages in the eastern part of the Bommelerwaard were largely evacuated, as well as Hedel. Historical Society Bommelerwaard: 'Between Voorn and Loevestein' (1995), 'Brief Description of the Bommelerwaard September 1944-May 1945' and Delpher.nl, *Trouw*, (a Dutch newspaper) 15 March 1945.

## **Sept. 24**

It's Sunday morning and shots are fired early on the Maas Bridge in Heusden. They spend all day catching people to help them with various tasks. The commander wanted people with big bellies.

Four people had to carry a stove on a wagon to a hut near the bridge and took turns acting like horses. Fortunately we have not been in Heusden that day.

## **Sept. 25**

There are more and more Krauts in the area here along the Maas River. They are all SS (*Schutzstaffel: a paramilitary organization within the political Nazi party NSDAP*). They have lack of everything. In the shops, everything must be ready for them. They play with their revolver, and things get delivered.

They have managed to find some cars here in the vicinity and a boat in the canal in Heusden. There must be betrayal involved.

## **Sept. 26**

The air force is back in action. It is towards Nijmegen. Four fighters dive towards the Maas and shoot at ships there. What a noise so close. In the evening, the same thing again, now close to Heusden. This afternoon, some (Fokkers) G.1 aircraft flew over here. The type we also had a few in '40.

The people in Den Bosch are now allowed to leave the city, and everyone gets out to collect food. The fire truck now collects milk for the St. Jan dairy factory.



Photos: Personal identification card of Jan Durenkamp. Collection of the Durenkamp family.

## Sept. 27

The first bombers fly over at 10 o'clock and it takes about an hour. The windows here shake from the thunder. There's a low layer of clouds.

In the afternoon at 3 o'clock a car stops. Three SS officers come to the office and demand butter. Fortunately, we have taken precautions, but we don't have the key immediately at hand to lock the door of the room where we have hidden the butter. We stand in front of it and take them down to the butter cellar. They see eight kilos of butter on the table there. They look everywhere, under and behind, but they still find nothing. I manage to negotiate for two more kilos for the sick people in the village and they take six kilos without receipts or money. Those scoundrels, they must have an invoice.

They come back on Friday for more. Actually, they wanted to have 30-40 kg.

When they go the office with their six kilos, one of them again searches the factory but finds nothing. We hold our breath and feel our hearts pounding in our throats when they get close to the butter. Fortunately, we can run ahead to unlock the front door and thus block the door in question.

It's a huge relief when they are gone.

We quickly sell the remaining butter to a few shopkeepers. The motivation to work suddenly disappears. What do they want on Friday?

Den Bosch now asks for standardized milk<sup>39</sup>, which means there is little butter production, and we sell it right away. Where there's none, Hitler loses his rights. We now wish every hour that the bridge had been blown up. Then we would have been rid of them. But how much longer will this terror last?

## Sept. 28

There are reconnaissance flights by fighter planes again. In the afternoon at 4 o'clock, four fighters dive down towards ships in the Maas. A bomb falls a few hundred meters behind the factory. A farmer taking cover in a ditch is struck by the air pressure and has a bruise behind his lungs.

## Sept. 29

At 8 o'clock in the morning, a wake-up call in Herpt. Bicycles confiscated. There are casualties in the first moments. One in front of the factory. A farmer who comes to collect butter also falls victim. He is one who lost everything in a bombing. Finally, we manage to make him wait with his bike. The German soldier rides back and forth. When we saw the opportunity, we fled, and the farmer raced after us. He was lucky when he got away. In the evening, he retrieved his bicycle. In the meantime, I had hidden my bicycle with a farmer behind the factory. It's sitting comfortably warm in the hay. They carried out house searches in most places. No results. Then they went into the fields. They (*the bicycles*) emerged from ditches, tobacco, and berry bushes. Four or five at a time.

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<sup>39</sup> Milk with a fat percentage of 2.5%. Milk directly from the cow contains a fat percentage of about 3.85%. Standardized milk has less fat to make butter from. Source: Wikipedia, lemma Milk Standardization.

In the afternoon at 3 o'clock, they left with their loot, the scoundrels. They also loaded three pigs for 160 guilders.

### **Sept. 30**

From 5 in the afternoon until 10 o'clock, we still had electricity. The rest of the day, we were without it. We now have to press the butter by hand. Den Bosch is now under English fire. Several projectiles have already fallen, causing fires and collapses with the necessary injuries and deaths. It's coming from the direction of Den Dungen. Bombers fly up and down all day.

### **Oct. 1**

After High Mass, it is announced that the residents of the municipality of Heusden can voluntarily go to work on the Maas bridge to build reinforcements. Between 1 and 2 o'clock, one can report to the town hall.

### **Oct. 2**

The result of Sunday is such that people are now being told to come to the bridge. They go in desperation, fearing that the municipality of Heusden will also be evacuated. Herpt must also contribute its share. The fighters have not left our airspace all day. They are attacking the ships anchored<sup>40</sup> in the Maas. Most of them are agrounded. Now they don't sink when they are leaking. The English don't seem to know that they are on the ground. They keep attacking. It's so close. We see the projectiles fired from the airplanes.

### **Oct. 3**

It has been exceptionally quiet now. It is somewhat rainy and foggy all day. In the afternoon, a German car arrives. The Krauts come to claim 50% of the production for themselves. The car suddenly speeds away under a few trees. Afraid of a fighter passing by.

### **Oct. 4**

The Germans confiscate a wagon with pneumatic tires. It must be delivered by the farmer-owner the next afternoon.

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<sup>40</sup> When ships couldn't be delivered immediately, they were laid up. They were then placed side by side in a harbor or along the bank of a river or canal.

## Oct. 5

The hunting aircrafts remain active. Nothing can pass through the Maas without their control. It's a beautiful sight every day, those dive-bombings, machine gun fire, etc.

In the afternoon, the Krauts come for the wagon in question because it has not been delivered. It's at the farmer's place just behind the factory. Two brothers and a sister live there<sup>41</sup>. Everybody has gone into hiding. There are two Germans who come to check all afternoon to see if they will get home. They are furious. Meanwhile, they have captured a second wagon in Herpt. The eldest boy is easily recognized by the Germans because he has red hair and cannot show his face because he was driving the wagon when they confiscated it yesterday.

The others come to warn around 6 o'clock to remove some things from the house. My bike is also there under the straw. The Krauts could return at any moment and turn everything upside down. We set up a watch and get to work. First, my bike. Then clothes, etc. When we're halfway done, suddenly a scream. They're approaching. Quickly, a shout to the inside of the house. Leave everything there and get out through a small stable door. Lock all doors and hide in the neighbouring farm while you keep watch.

We see a Kraut coming onto the yard, goes into the barn, and then walks around all the doors of the farmhouse to get in. Despite all the hurry, we were fortunately able to lock everything closed. They would then know that everything was nearby. When it's safe again, we retrieve the rest of the things they think they need. They will probably have to leave the place for a few days now.

## Oct. 6

There are plenty of hunting and combat aircraft above the Maas again. But now there is anti-aircraft artillery in many places.

In the afternoon at 5 o'clock, four-engine bombers fly overhead. They return at half past 5. They are being shot at from Den Bosch and Heusden. The anti-aircraft guns converge here above the village. Fragments from the shells fall everywhere, but no aircraft comes down. Six soldiers are standing at the factory and start firing with their rifles, but none of them comes down. However, the bullets are easy to follow as a glowing dot and, as far as can be seen at that distance, come quite close.

## Oct. 7

It's relatively quiet. In the afternoon, some shooting from the aircraft. No more anti-aircraft fire to be heard. It's possible that it has been relocated.

The Germans were finally able to steal some butter, 70 kg. They walked right into it. We were just emptying the churn.

Since Wednesday evening, we have been hearing the heavy artillery fire almost continuously.

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<sup>41</sup> Bertus, Thé and An van Beijnen. At the time of writing this message, Jan does not yet know that An will become his spouse in 1947.

### **Oct. 8**

During High Mass, they come to the mentioned farmer<sup>42</sup> (the farm right behind the milk factory) to get the wagon. They find people there. It's a good thing too. If they couldn't return with the wagon, they would have had to burn down the whole place.

### **Oct. 9**

They have started seizing wagons again. There have been casualties again. At the factory, we now have two Germans who have to ensure that no other comrades come to claim the butter. In the afternoon, they can start working immediately. An SS car stops and they come for butter. But they must stay away from it. We are pleased with this. Once we have delivered to them, we are free from them for the entire week and won't be bothered by other raiders. One of them is very good one. He wants nothing to do with the party, the SS, etc.

### **Oct. 10**

Hundreds of cows have passed through here. All evacuation livestock taken by the Germans on their retreat. They are very cruel to the animals. There is blood everywhere along the road. They stab them with bayonets when things don't go their way.

### **Oct. 11**

Today, horses have to come again to be inspected. Where will the looting end? If it continues like this, there will literally be nothing left. The farmer who is in the worst condition has now lost: two pigs, a bike, a horse with harness, a wagon with pneumatic tires.

### **Oct. 12**

Evacuees from Berlicum can be expected at any moment, and they will be accommodated here<sup>43</sup>. This is a reprisal measure. The Germans had found a secret transmitter there. The residents here are required to start digging again. The ramparts on the south side [of Heusden], the so-called Herpt gate, are being prepared for defense.

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See the text fragment from Oct. 5.

<sup>43</sup> The residents of Berlicum - where many evacuees from Schijndel had also been accommodated since September 27, totaling about 5,000 people - were ordered by the Germans to evacuate the village on October 10, 1944. A large portion of them moved to Den Bosch or even further into De Langstraat. [Source: Delpher.nl, *The Free Press*, December 2, 1944.]"

### Oct. 13

The evacuees have not arrived yet. Herpt is now in turmoil because the Germans are looking for shelter there. It is the staff members located near Tilburg who want to move from there, according to the German soldier who guards the factory. He has been gathering information. The army officers themselves are scouting for places. The director<sup>44</sup>, the pastor, and the head teacher<sup>45</sup> must leave.

In the afternoon, at half past 2, suddenly a message that it was canceled. It is not good enough for the gentlemen. There is no water supply here. The soldier can sleep on straw. The officers cannot be here because there is no running water. That is National Socialism, according to the guard here. Fortunately, Herpt was spared this.

### Oct. 14

In the morning at 8 o'clock, the same song again. The North Brabant staff members settle in Herpt. And now it becomes a reality. It's a busy scene. The pastor has to evacuate and has to leave everything behind, the farm opposite the pastonage also has to clear. My bedroom has also been requisitioned along with the front room, and I now have moved back to my first lodging and I am sleeping at Aunt's again. I am still eating on the Laagstraat.

### Oct. 15

The priest starts singing the Gloria with all his heart, and immediately the rattle of a machine gun from an English plane. Bullets rain down on the church. It's a deafening noise. We all seek refuge against the wall. Everyone flees from the pews. Behind the altar, in the confessional, the sacristy.

A second volley follows. It was aimed at cars hiding everywhere under the trees. Fortunately, the bullets do not penetrate the wall. There are pieces missing from the wall everywhere. Sand on the church square and holes in the asphalt road. Fortunately, no casualties among the population. A Kraut car has a broken window and a hole in the hood. Also, no casualties. Cars are no longer visible now. Everything has been driven inside people's homes. The High Mass continues as a reading mass and at 10:35 a.m., we are outside.

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<sup>44</sup> Mr. Gerardus Johannes Boswerger. SALHA, Newspaper Collection, 1203, inventory number 7, *The Echo of the South News and advertising newspaper for Tilburg, Waalwijk, Kaatsheuvel, and the surrounding areas*, July 27, 1948.

<sup>45</sup> Likely Mr. Petrus Antonius de Man. SALHA, Population Registers of places under the municipalities of Altena and Heusden, access code 9999, inventory numbers 26 and 3981.



The St. Catharinakerk in Herpt, built in 1924.  
*Picture: Wies van Leeuwen, collection BHIC, nr. PNB001035801.*

### **Oct. 16**

Now we have to be careful when we see hunting aircrafts. The Germans have a small siren for their own use. You can hear the thing screaming nearby when it's unsafe. Yet it remains quiet all day long. The flying weather is not ideal. It has been rainy all day.

### **Oct. 17**

Eight people, men and women, have been brought from Tiel to Herpt by the Germans. Some Krauts have been killed there. They are now awaiting their sentence, which will be handed down by the military authorities.

### **Oct. 18**

Now two Englishmen are visiting Herpt. Their plane has crashed, and they have been made prisoners of war.

### **Oct. 19**

Since the arrival of the general staff, air raid sirens have been heard almost all day long. For every plane that passes by, we hear a scream. The device certainly comes from a toy store. It is just something a couple of kids can play with. The German armed forces now need 50 workers to do digging work. They are designated with the help of the constable. They are now building roadside shelters where cars can take cover.

### **Oct. 20**

Today, there were intense attacks by airplanes. The ferry of the Herpt crossing has been run into the ground. In Heusden, the Germans are constructing an emergency bridge in the harbor. Some 25 kg bombs were dropped on it, but with no result. The anti-aircraft defense against the planes is tremendous, especially from Hedel. The projectiles explode here. It's a terrible sound. However, there is no tangible result can be identified.

### **Oct. 21**

Mother's<sup>46</sup> birthday. Congratulations. A letter has been written, but given the current situation it is probably still on its way.

Last night, the staff was about to leave twice. Unfortunately, they are not gone yet. The activity in the air is very high again. The bridge in Hedel is the target of the planes. However, still without results.

### **Oct. 22**

On Sunday we hear heavy booming all day long. A tank battle is raging east of Den Bosch. We now have a Feldwebel<sup>47</sup> stationed here. He is a preacher.

### **Oct. 23**

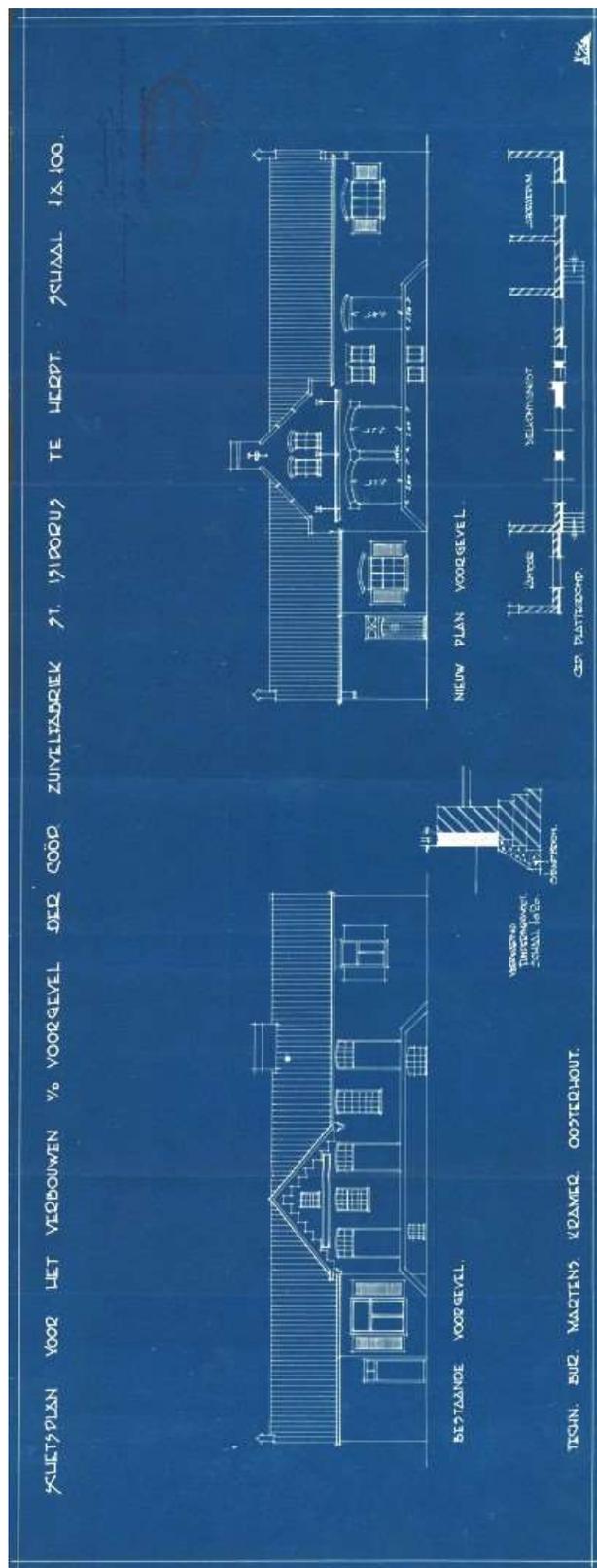
Everything indicates that the fighting is getting closer, and the final chapter of the occupation is coming to an end.

The fighters are doing their best again. They sank the Herpt ferry.

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<sup>46</sup> Petronella Johanna Catharina Durenkamp-Albers (born 21-10-1885 - died 8-7-1969).

<sup>47</sup> Non-commissioned officer.



Construction drawing of the facade of the cooperative dairy factory St. Isidorus in Herpt, 1963. Regional Archives Langstraat Heusden Altena, the Collective Building Permits Heusden 1943-1996, access 0246, inventory number 609.

### **Oct. 24**

There was staff activity in the afternoon. The cables are partially rolled up again. The soldiers all carry their travel blankets on their backs. At 11 o'clock in the evening, they retreat via Heusden across the Maas to Genderen. In the same night, we hear artillery fire. The shells keep exploding incessantly. By the time the night is over, none of us have slept.

### **Oct. 25**

The first English prisoners, a group of 50 soldiers, march past here in the afternoon and have to cross the Maas. They are all young men, around twenty years old. They look tired. We can't show any signs of sympathy, but there's a sneaky wink that is immediately reciprocated.

### **Oct. 26**

The night is over. As for me, I slept well. The artillery fire was again terrible. First, a flash of light and a blast from the firing. Then we hear the projectiles whistling and then an explosion that shakes everything. Most people have not gone to bed or are sleeping in their cellar or bomb shelter.

In the afternoon, the Krauts return to prepare shelter. People have just cleaned and tidied up their houses when the second bad news comes out. Six artillery pieces come from the other side of the Maas to Herpt and are stationed here. Many people dare not go to bed. If the Tommies find them and shoot back!!

### **Oct. 27**

The Heusden bridge was hit several times by grenades last night. However, it is not destroyed. There are some holes in the road surface. The water pipe that runs along the road has also been damaged. However, the bridge is still in use for traffic. We do not yet know whether the shooting by the English artillery was intended for the bridge or for the German artillery located in Herpt, which is about two thousand meters from the bridge.

It is a constant stream of soldiers and vehicles the whole day long. Red Cross vehicles come and go.

### **Oct. 28**

The day starts with reconnaissance flights. At ten o'clock, there are attacks by airplanes on the artillery here and on anti-aircraft guns.

Military transports. Hearing and seeing is overwhelming. The artillery fire from the English is incessant. In the evening, at 5 o'clock, we set up the butter cellars for sleeping quarters. It is

no longer safe at home. The director with his wife and child, his mother-in-law, the engineer<sup>48</sup>, and myself.

At 8 o'clock, Germans arrive with a lieutenant to set up what they call a "Gefechtsstand"<sup>49</sup> in a cellar. We first show them a storage cellar, but then also the butter cellar. Both must be evacuated. The director is at his wit's end. He gets easily nervous. Then he worries about his wife, who is expecting a baby. Fortunately, there is an Oberstleutnant (Lieutenant Colonel) billeted here. He manages to ensure that the butter cellar remains available for us.

### **Oct. 29**

The night has passed. The firing continued almost incessantly. We could not sleep much because of the impact of the shells, but we knew we were safe. Several cows lie dead or injured outside.

At quarter past 8, we hear that the priest will only celebrate one more Mass, at half past 8. Those who cannot come will be given dispensation. We quickly get dressed and go there.

### **Oct. 30**

Many projectiles landed in Heusden last night. One dead, one seriously injured, two feet shot off, and damage to houses. Everyone now sleeps in bomb shelters, etc. No one dares to stay upstairs at night. In the afternoon, the extermination troops blew two holes in the road surface of the bridge in front of the factory, which is now loaded.

### **Oct. 31**

As a precaution, we have cleared the glassware in the factory. The windows that can be taken out have been removed. At home<sup>50</sup> it's like a barracks. We can't say how many soldiers are housed here. Cars and motorcycles in the rear building, always different ones.

### **Nov. 1**

The night passed quietly. It's unusual in our new place of residence. We could to sleep in. At 9 o'clock, the projectiles whistled again. High Mass has been canceled. We were able to attend mass in Heusden.

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<sup>48</sup> Probably Mr. G.A. van Beukering. SALHA, Newspaper Collection, 1203, Inventory Number 54, *Newspaper for the Land of Heusden and Altena, the Langstraat and the Bommelerwaard*, April 28, 1944.

<sup>49</sup> Command post.

<sup>50</sup> See footnote 12.

## **Nov. 2**

Heusden and the surrounding area are under English artillery fire. There is a constant whistling of the projectiles. In my boarding house a projectile flies against the wall, luckily in longitudinal direction. A hole in the wall, but it ends up outside, and did not explode. It happens right before I get home. Hits on church and houses in Heusden. Four people dead. They now flee to Herpt.

In the afternoon we have to take shelter behind trees and houses several times to avoid the whistling projectiles.

## **Nov. 3**

The night in the cellar has passed quietly. In the distance the artillery fire from the English can be heard. The morning is quiet. In the afternoon, two young Krauts visit to ask for butter. Naturely, I reject their request. I have to take them to the cellar. First, I grab the key and immediately hide our supplies under the mattresses. Then, I go back with them to the cellar to confirm my denial with the truth. However, they don't believe it when they see nothing. One of the two decides to thoroughly search the cellar. If they find anything, then I can go with them. The director wakes up from his afternoon nap together with his daughter and runs towards the noise in his underwear.

It's a fortunate distraction for me, and gradually they start to leave. We don't see soldiers anymore. No traffic. It now appears to be abandoned. After a calm night, it is now Saturday.

## **Nov. 4**

It's remarkably quiet, and there are no indications that the war came that close that day. Suddenly, in the afternoon around half past four, a tank battle breaks out. The grenades are coming so close that we can barely reach the cellar. When it calms down a bit, we go outside to get some bread. However, we have to wait a little longer before we can go back to the cellar. The whistling of the grenades is always-present.

At 7 o'clock, I'll briefly go home to eat and I can have a look in the direction of Drunen. A huge sea of fire that illuminates everything in the area.

At night, we are awakened from a peaceful sleep - considering the circumstances. Some Germans have smashed a factory door and are now standing in front of us in the basement. They are angry that we didn't open the door for them. After much talking, we can convince them that their knocking wasn't loud enough to disturb our first sleep. Their intention is to get us out of the basement and let the frontline soldiers enjoy a few hours of sleep there. In the end they settle for a basement that we do not use. We can resume our disturbed sleep and anticipate further events that may occur.

## **Nov. 5**

In the morning, around 4 o'clock, we hear tremendous explosions nearby. At this point we can only make assumptions. We go outside around 7 o'clock. The neighbors around the factory are also awake. When we arrive at the factory, we see a pile of rubble. The demolition crews

have done their work here. St. Gertrude Tower<sup>51</sup>, dating back to the 13th century and a cultural monument that they fought so hard to preserve, has been blown up. Coincidentally, the local residents knew what their plan was and were able to find a safer place for a few hours. Their plan also included blowing up the Catholic church, but fortunately, it didn't come to that<sup>52</sup>.

It has become a catastrophe in Heusden. Two churches, a mill, and the town hall<sup>53</sup> have been blown up. Everything here is in mourning now.

The town hall had exceptionally well-built cellars with brick arches. Walls several meters thick. Two hundred people have spent nights seeking shelter from the artillery fire. The Germans also tried to house the nuns from the hospital there, but that was not successful. They then brought in ammunition in boxes of sand and blew the whole thing up. The victims were buried under five to six meters of rubble. It took exactly eight days to recover the last victim. Under the town hall alone, 135<sup>54</sup> people died. Before and after November 5, this number rose to about 200. Ten percent of the population died.

At 12 o'clock, a group of Germans walks around the factory. Behind the factory, they set up a machine gun at a farmhouse, while the Krauts on the roof of another farm spy on the English. In the distance we see an Allied tank. They also use flamethrowers in the area. When I go home around 2 o'clock to eat something hot, I get to see some of it too.

After we've eaten, I climb into the barn to the top of the house to explore the area. Then the German artillery fire starts, not stop until 6 o'clock the next morning, and to reduce a part of Herpt in ashes.

I have been sitting in my landlady's basement for an hour now, and these are anxious moments. Grenades fly on all sides and explode. Direct hits to our left and right. People can hardly help each other. There's danger everywhere. Our basement is far from shrapnel-proof. It's only halfway underground, and the roof is made of wood. When it calms down a bit, I make my escape. Back to the factory. On the way, I see that there's a fire in the village. But I have to take cover again in a farmhouse because a shell makes a hole in the ground at the front. Pieces are flying around us. Again, no cellar here. We're just standing under the hay stored under the ridge of the roof. When I'm out of there and safely in the factory cellar, two direct hits have struck that farmhouse.

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<sup>51</sup> This was the St. Trudo Tower of the Reformed Church in Herpt.

<sup>52</sup> Apparently, this tower was initially 'forgotten'. The German soldiers who discovered it did not have explosives with them, so the tower was spared. (Reference: Winkelman, Heusden Tormented and Liberated, p. 49-50).

<sup>53</sup> The detailed story of the town hall disaster in Heusden is recounted by J.P.M. van de Mortel in 'The Town Hall Disaster of Heusden: Liberation without Joy' (Heusden 1994).

<sup>54</sup> The number of dead recovered from the rubble of the town hall was 133. In the afternoon of November 12, the last victim was recovered. In the meantime, a severely wounded woman who had been previously rescued from the rubble had passed away. This brought the total number to 134. Reference: L. de Munck and B. van der Veer, 'To Not Forget...' (Heusden 1984) p. 85.



Reformed St. Trudo Church in Herpt, around 1940.  
*Regional Archives Langstraat Heusden Altena, Image Bank, HSD06975, Publisher L.J. Veerman.*



Reformed St. Trudo Church in Herpt, after the night of November 4-5, 1944. *SALHA, Image Bank, HSD08497.*



The remnants of the town hall of Heusden after the night of November 4-5, 1944.  
*Regional Archives Langstraat Heusden Altena, Image Bank, HSD08493 (above) and HSD01326 (below).*

Fortunately, there were no personal injury. At the same time, the fire continued to spread. The flames spread from one farmhouse to another. Behind the factory, wherever you looked, it was a sea of fire. We could still offer a little help here and there. Moving some livestock to a pasture, assisting with carrying a little clothing and bedding. But there was too little time, and too many farms were ablaze for us to accomplish anything meaningful. Everything went up in flames. All this under a rain of shells from the other side of the Maas, where the Germans had retreated.

Four families whose homes had burned down took refuge with us and brought what little they had managed to save to the factory. It was a long procession of sorrow entering here. Women and children were crying, carrying a few blankets over their arms, and dragging broken mattresses pierced by shell fragments. Unforgettable. Fortunately, everything could be accommodated in three cellars and we like to assume that it is safe here.

Then the artillery fire really intensified. We could hear the shooting, the whistling of projectiles, and then the impact. Hundreds of them. We were all under blankets and mattresses, feeling somewhat safe from shrapnel in case of a direct hit. It's unbelievable and hard to convey that the factory remained unscathed in such a hail of iron.

Everything around us was burning, every house and farm had direct hits. We were spared. House facades were blown off, roofs torn away, and so on. We kept hearing the crackling fire in the cellar. Every now and then, after an explosion, the two of us would quickly run outside to check and make sure the factory above our heads wasn't engulfed in flames. Incredibly, this had not happened. We had been visibly protected this night.

At least twelve farms burned down around the factory, along with their associated barns<sup>55</sup>. Several farms and houses were heavily damaged and some lightly damaged. There was also damage to windows, broken roof tiles, and so on. The factory only suffered damage to windows and a few small holes from shell fragments in the churn. So passed this restless night, which none of us will ever forget. The shooting is slightly less frequent now, and we tried to get some rest on our makeshift beds for a while.

## **Nov. 6**

At 6 o'clock in the morning, we cautiously emerge trying to assess the devastation around us with a quick glance. However, we're not given much time. Another rain of grenades falls, and we have to take cover again. We all return to the cellars unscathed and wait patiently for what's to come. It remains quiet now. At 7 o'clock, we hear noise rolling across the street. We can't identify the sound. When we go outside to take a look, we see the first Allied combat vehicles standing in front of the factory.

It's unbelievable. We all got through this night unscathed and now we are liberated from the Germans.

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<sup>55</sup> The farmhouse of An, Bertus and Thé Van Beijnen also fell victim to the flames.

## Coöperatieve Zuivelfabriek „ST. ISIDORUS” te Luttelherpt.



A. J. VAN GREVENBROEK  
Oprichter en Eerste Voorzitter

In Mei van dit jaar was het 40 jaar geleden dat de boterfabriek te Herpt tot stand kwam. Naar aanleiding van dit feit is een jaarverslag verschenen, dat er kennis geeft en waarin meerdere feiten over het verloop der fabriek gedurende deze 40 jaar zijn opgenomen.

De Voorzitter, de heer Christ A. J. v. Herpt gaf in een uitvoerig artikel een overzicht, waaraan wij het een en ander ontleenen.

Op 6 Februari 1907 werd in een vergadering van de R.K. Boerenstand, na een inleiding van de heer Wintermans, amschenneulent te Eindhoven besloten een eigen boterfabriek te beginnen.

De statuten werden vastgesteld

en er werd besloten te bouwen op een stuk grond van H. J. Luyben te Luttelherpt, de plaats waar de fabriek thans staat. De bouwkosten bedroegen 13 à 14000 gulden. 1 Mei 1908 ging de fabriek aan het draaien met een aantal van 240 koeken, niettegenstaande er in de oprichtingsvergadering 500 waren opgegeven.

Oprichter en eerste Voorzitter was de heer A. J. v. Grevenbroek, die dit bleef tot 1922 toe. De fabriek werd gebouwd door de aannemer A. J. v. Horen te Herpt.

Geestelijk adviseur was de Zee-Kerk, Heer H. Kocken, pastoor te Hedikhuisen, die in 1928 overleed. Hij werd opgevolgd door pi-

etruer Mejs uit Hedikhuisen, die in 1937 naar Lithogen vertrok. Zijn plaats werd toen ingenomen door de Zee-Kerk, Heer G. Grijndeman, eveneens pastoor te Hedikhuisen, die het Geestelijk Adviseurchap ook thans nog waarneemt.

In 1922 werd de heer J. v. Engelen als Voorzitter opgevolgd door de heer C. J. v. Gevenbroek, die dit bleef tot 1931. Van 1931—1939 was de heer A. M. Dams, Voorzitter.

Eerste directeur was de heer G. Miedema, in Dec. 1911 werd deze opgevolgd door zijn broer S. Miedema, die in 1933 wegens zijn benoeming te Dordrecht werd vervangen door de heer G. J. Boswerper, die dit bleef tot April 1947. In zijn plaats kwam de tegenwoordige directeur de heer Th. Geurts.

Secretarissen waren in de loop van deze 40 jaren de heer H. J. Luyben 1907—1934, N. v. d. Water van 1934 tot heden.

Gedurende deze 40 jaren heeft de fabriek herhaaldelijk uitbreiding ondergaan en werd haar fabrieksoverlating verbeterd. Dit kan bliken uit het feit dat fabriek en gebouwen in 1943 tegen modestverzekerd werden tot een bedrag van f 120.000.

De fabriek is gegroeid en hoewel zij onder de kleinere fabrieken moet worden gerangschikt, staat zij aan de spits van de aangesloten fabrieken bij de Brab. Zuivelbond, vooral wat de kwaliteit harer producten betreft.

Naast hield aan het bestuur komt daardoor zeer zeker ook bijde toe aan het personeel, dat door zijn werken een product heeft weten te bereiken dat wordt geroemil.

Hedenavond wordt een algemeene ledenvergadering gehouden, waarin Mr. J. J. Wintermans, oud-ruvelcomend van Noordholland te Den Haag een lezing zal houden.

In iedere parochie van het werkgebied is vanmorgen een H. Mic opgedragen, waarin Gods bijstand is afgesmeekt voor het welzijn der fabriek.

Translation of the newspaper article on July 22, 1948 on the occasion of the fortiest anniversary of the dairy plant in Herpt

*“In May this year it will be 40 years since the butter factory in Herpt was founded. As a result, an annual report has been published, that looks neat and contains various photos over this period of 40 years.*

*The chairman, Mr. Christ A.J. van Herpt, provided an overview in an extensive article, from which we deduce a number of things.*

*On February 6, 1907 during a meeting of the Roman Catholic Farmers Union, after an introduction by Mr. Wintermans, dairy consultant in Eindhoven, it was decided to start their own butter factory.*

*The statuts were established and it was decided to build on a piece of land owned by H.J. Luyben, the current location of the factory. The construction costs amounted to 13,000 to 14,000 guilders. The factory went into operation on May 1, 1908 with a number of 240 cows, although 300 cows were indicated at the foundation meeting.*

*Founder and first chairman was Mr. A.J. van Grevenbroek, who held this position untill 1922. The factory was built bij contractor A.J. van Horen from Herpt. Honorable Mr. Kocken, pastor in Hedikhuizen, was the spiritual advisor. He died in 1928. He was succeeded by Meijs, also pastor in Hedikhuizen, who left for Litthoyen in 1937. His place was taken over by honorable Mr. Gründeman, also pastor in Hedikhuizen, who is still a spiritual advisor.*

*In 1922 Mr. J. van Engelen was succeeded as chairman by Mr. C.J. van Grevenbroek, who held this position untill 1933. From 1933 to 1939 Mr. A.M. Buijs was chairman.*

*The first director was Mr. G. Miedema. In December 1911 he was succeeded by his brother S. Miedema, who, due to his appointment in Doetinchem, was replaced by Mr. G.J. Boswenger, who held this position until April 1947.*

*Over the course of these forty years, the secretaries were Mr. H.J. Luyben from 1907 untill 1934 and N. van de Water from 1934 to now.*

*During these forty years the factory has undergone repeated expansions and the factory equipment has been improved. This is evident from the insured amount of 130.000 guilders for the equipment and the buildings against damage.*

*The factory has grown and although it may be considered one of the smaller ones, it is one of the top of the dairies affiliated with the Dairy Union of the province of Brabant, especially when it comes to the quality of the products. In addition to a tribute to the board, there is certainly a tribute also to the staff, who through their work have managed to create a product that is praised.*

*A general membershipmeeting will be held this evening, in which Mr. J.J. Wintermans from The Hague, former dairy consultant of Noord-Brabant, will give a speech.*

*This morning a Holy Mass has been celebrated in every parish in the factory's working area, imploring God's help for the well-being of the factory.”*



The Board and the director of the dairy factory in 1948: (from left to right): N. v.d. Water, A.T. Buijs, Chr. A.J. Van Herpt, A.M. Buijs, Director Th. Geurtz, G. v. Ooyen, Jac Pulles.

**The last weeks before the liberation in Herpt and surrounding area**  
***The war diary of Jan Durenkamp***

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Jan Durenkamp kept a diary from September 4 to November 6, 1944. As assistant director of the dairy factory in Herpt, he took daily notes of what was happening there and in the surrounding area. It was a turbulent period. At the beginning of September 1944, liberation seemed near, but unfortunately it took several months. Herpt and the surrounding area ended up on the front line between Allied and German army units. The area was confronted with raids by retreating German soldiers. As the Allies approached, the shelling increased. Shortly before the liberation, the Germans destroyed several church towers and the town hall of Heusden. Durenkamp puts all this into words in detail day after day thus conjures up a compelling image of Herpt and the surrounding area in these last months before the liberation.

