

The Canadian Army and the Liberated Netherlands



by Michiel Horn

Aircraft dropping parcels of food; large, cheering crowds crammed together along roads; columns of trucks and armoured vehicles inching along, covered with laughing young women and children: few images in the recent history of The Netherlands are more powerful than those associated with the liberation of the country in 1945. A Canadian intelligence officer named John Morgan Gray wrote in his memoirs: "The war might have been all futile madness but this seemed to me a splendid moment, if only for the excite-

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ment and the joy and the tears of the people beside the road."¹

I know just how splendid the moment was, for I stood beside one of those roads in May of 1945, a five-year-old welcoming the "Tommies." They were English, units of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment of the 49th West Riding Division, which was part of First Canadian Corps at the time. The sights and sounds of the spring and summer months of 1945 are unforgettable; the wailing bagpipes of the North Nova Scotia Highlanders are permanently engraved into my brain. The force of my memories led me in the 1970s to undertake research on the liberation of The Netherlands, focusing on the Canadian Army.² While I did not ignore military operations, my primary interest was in the relations between the liberating forces and the civilian population.

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Canadian involvement in the liberation of The Netherlands took place in three major stages. The first centered on the western third of North Brabant and on Zeeland, and lasted from September into early November of 1944. The second extended from late March to early May of 1945, when the northern and eastern provinces of Groningen, Friesland, Drente, Overijssel and most of Gelderland were cleared. The third and final stage took place after the general ceasefire in the West on May 5th.

It is this third stage, completed by May 8th, that many Netherlands still think of as "de bevrijding," for it affected the most populous part of the country and included its four largest cities: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht. Here,

too, the euphoria was greatest, because wholesale death by starvation had come closest in this area and because people already knew that Nazi Germany had collapsed. A Canadian officer wrote:

Whatever their routes, the convoys were greeted with the wildest of enthusiasm by hysterically happy crowds lining the roads. . . . Thousands of country folk and burghers . . . lined the roads and blocked the way through the towns, to laugh, to wave, to shout, to weep. . . . Each Canadian private was a Christ, a saviour. . . .³

An exaggeration, perhaps? Here is how a woman remembered it thirty-five years afterwards:

. . . I saw a tank in the distance, with one soldier's head above it, and the blood drained out of my body, and I thought: "Here comes liberation." And as the tank came nearer and nearer, I had no breath left, and the soldier stood up and he was like a saint. There was a big hush over all the people, and it was suddenly broken by a big scream, as if it was out of the earth. And the people climbed on the tank, and took the soldier out, and they were crying. And we were running with the tanks and the jeeps, all the way into the city.⁴

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A liberating army quickly turns into an army of occupation, a welcome one but an army of occupation nevertheless. And the relations between armies of occupation and the peoples among which they find themselves are fraught with difficulties. The relationship is that of a superordinate armed force and a subordinate population. This opens up great potential for abuse of power. Military discipline needs to be firm indeed to prevent soldiers from exploiting civilians. And military discipline can hardly prevent civilians from seeking to use soldiers for *their* own ends. Some fraternization is bound to take place even when it is forbidden. Where fraternization is encouraged, however, problems in the military-civilian relationship may become nearly unmanageable. The social history of the Canadian army in The Netherlands during the liberation period, which started in the fall of 1944 and ended in the spring of 1946, does not contradict this judgment.

There had been fraternization between Dutch civilians and German servicemen, and from the Dutch side this was not limited to people who belonged to the national socialist movement. But

most of the population had as little as possible to do with the "moffen," the enemy. Those who, because of the positions they held, were forced into an unwelcome degree of association with the Germans were apt to be apologetic.

With the Canadians it was otherwise. They were allies. Canada was where Princess Juliana and her two children had found refuge, where her third daughter was born. And because Canadians were ethnically very similar to the Dutch, they did not face barriers of racial prejudice. The Canadian soldiers were welcomed as friends and partners who, together with the American, British, and Russian forces, had done what the small Netherlands armed forces were manifestly incapable of doing: bring about the defeat of Germany. No one needed to apologize for associating with *these* invaders.

The exuberance of the first welcome soon wore off. Indeed, friction was inherent in the presence of a large body of young men able to command goods and services unavailable to civilians. Although, on balance, the Canadians never ceased to be seen in a favourable light, criticism of them mounted as the months passed. Today the memories of the liberation period are overwhelmingly positive; the experience at the time was otherwise.

This should not surprise us. The condition of The Netherlands at the end of the war made it difficult to accommodate the more than 170,000 Canadian servicemen and women who passed through The Netherlands, sojourning there for weeks or months before repatriation. They found themselves among a densely settled population that in the course of five years of occupation, especially during its last months, had been robbed, starved, and oppressed. F.S.V. Donnison writes: "The ordeal they had passed through was incomparably more severe than that suffered by any other country liberated in the west."⁵ The western and central provinces had suffered most from desperate shortages of food and fuel during the final months of the war, but life had scarcely been easy elsewhere, even in the southern provinces liberated during the fall of 1944. All over the country bombing and shelling had produced serious building shortages. Public transportation had ceased to function; private transportation comprised a few horsedrawn vehicles and a larger, unknown number of dilapidated bicycles. Almost 250,000 Netherlanders had died in the war, more than 40 percent of them Jews who had perished in the Nazi

“final solution.” Thousands of men had been deported to Germany to perform forced labour; at the end of the war most were still there.

Just as important were the changed patterns of behavior and attitudes the war had fostered. Most people had become acquainted with the black market that flourished during the war. Parental authority and male dominance had declined, especially in the cities and towns, where women and younger teenagers became the scroungers of the necessities of life. A premium had been placed on deceit, theft, and ingenious mendicancy as people struggled to protect themselves and their dependants, and to survive. (Brecht, in the *Dreigroschenoper*, put it well: “Erst kommt das Fressen; dann kommt die Moral.”) The dislocations of the post-armistice period made it unlikely that pre-war behavior patterns and attitudes would soon reassert themselves.

Liberation did not restore plenty or even a sufficiency of goods. The supply of basic foodstuffs did increase, but serious shortages persisted: of coal and hence electricity and gas, of petroleum products, of housing, clothing, and virtually all other consumer goods. War damage and a lack of rolling stock, motorized vehicles, and fuel delayed the restoration of public transportation. It took time for deportees to return from abroad. It took much longer for normality to return to The Netherlands. In the meantime the Canadian forces found themselves in the midst of an unsettled society living through what has been called “de dolle, dwaze zomer van '45,” the mad, crazy summer of 1945.

It was virtually a patriotic duty to express gratitude to the Canadian conquering heroes. They were also well supplied with food and certain desirable consumer goods, cigarettes foremost among them. Soon serving as a reserve currency in the black market, Canadian cigarettes were in hot demand not just by smokers but by almost everyone else.

Initially generous with their food and cigarettes, some Canadians did not wait long to expect more than mere thanks. Relations with civilians acquired a rock-hard commercial side in which the cigarette loomed large. This spawned friction, though not as much as the relations between servicemen and civilian women. The practice of reserving scarce recreation facilities for exclusive military use was also unpopular. Among civilians, envy and resentment soon took their place alongside gratitude.

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Two pressing problems faced First Canadian Corps on May 8. One was the assembly and disarming of 120,000 German servicemen, collecting their stores of food and war materials, and supervising their removal to Germany. This was largely completed by the end of May. The other was relief of the Dutch population: the distribution of food and coal, and assistance to civilian medical personnel seeking to deal with serious public health problems, including outbreaks of typhus, typhoid, and dysentery. On May 24 responsibility for these tasks passed to Headquarters Netherlands District, but

*The soldier stood up and he
was like a saint.*

First Canadian Corps transport continued to be centrally important.

An initially less pressing problem was maintaining the morale of the troops. At the close of hostilities it was excellent. But General H.D.G. Crerar, Commander-in-Chief of First Canadian Army, knew from his experience during the 1914-1918 war how easy it was to lose *esprit de corps* while men were waiting for repatriation. “Commanders must devote a great deal of imaginative thought and energy to the utilization of ways and means which will revive and strengthen this essential possession,” he wrote on May 8, V-E Day. The men need a judicious blend of duty and pleasure, continued training, and recreation. “The essential thing is to keep all ranks mentally and/or physically active.”⁶ This way discipline would be preserved.

It is unlikely that Crerar gave due weight to the threat to discipline represented by fraternization with the Dutch. Indeed, he and other commanders saw this as a positive good. The directive whereby the 3rd Infantry Division, which had ended the war in Germany, was ordered in mid-May to take the place of the English 49th Division in the Utrecht area, gave the move the name “Operation Fraternize.” After being among the “cold and sullen” people of northern Germany, the division “greatly appreciated . . . the welcome given to the troops” in Holland: “Everywhere . . . people smiled, waved and made us feel welcome. Signs and regulations informed the men that fraternization was in order. . . .”⁷ Soldiers were invited into homes and

given a taste of Dutch "gezelligheid," a word encompassing coziness and companiability. Cut off from their own home life, many servicemen were glad to share that of others. With them they brought canned meat, tea, coffee, chocolate, chewing gum, and cigarettes. They also brought tales of adventure and danger. English and French were understood well enough in The Netherlands that such tales (tall or otherwise) found appreciative audiences.

Throughout the summer and autumn the Entertainment Committee of The Netherlands, founded and staffed by civilians, helped to bring soldiers and civilians together at social functions of various kinds. These probably helped maintain the morale of the troops. But certain aspects of fraternization undermined military discipline. The country was poor, earning a living far from easy. Many civilians took to more or less subtle forms of begging from the soldiers or offered the inflated wartime paper currency, in whose long-term value no one had confidence, in exchange for goods, especially cigarettes. By mid-summer the buying price on the black market stabilized at one guilder for one Canadian cigarette (the official exchange rate was one guilder⁵ 40 cents Canadian). The selling price, reflecting the danger of heavy fines and imprisonment that black marketeers faced, was as high as five guilders a cigarette. Many people nevertheless indulged their craving for tobacco. Given that a skilled labourer might earn 40 guilders a week and an unskilled labourer 25, it is not surprising that the black market attracted many.

Nor is it hard to understand how the Canadians quickly found a way of getting hold of large amounts of Dutch money. Soldiers were under orders neither to sell goods to civilians nor barter with them, but enforcement was minimal and the opportunities were tempting. A soldier's relatives could send him 1,000 cigarettes for only three dollars, courtesy of tobacco companies patriotically eager to recruit customers. Even the heaviest smoker could supply the black market, and while he could not exchange illicitly obtained guilders for dollars, he could buy jewelry or antiques and arrange for them to be shipped home. Some shrewd and enterprising souls did exactly that. Others managed to arrange for very cheap leaves in Paris. Most servicemen who engaged in the trade, however, probably did not go beyond drinking cheaply in the military clubs and

messes, which accepted Dutch money since that was what the troops were issued. Dismayed paymasters found that they were getting back far more guilders than had been paid out! Many soldiers were still carrying around wads of Dutch bills for which they had found no use when, on September 26, 1945, currency reform rendered them worthless.⁸

Illegal though the business of selling cigarettes was, the risks of being caught and prosecuted were tiny. A commission of inquiry appointed by Crerar's successor, Lieutenant-General Guy Simonds, found that "the great majority of the Canadians in Holland habitually sold cigarettes to the civilian population, and while this was generally known it was impracticable with the Provost Forces available to curb the practice. . . ."⁹

One commodity that not a few enlisted men tried to obtain with their cigarettes was hard liquor. Only the officers', warrant officers', and sergeants' messes were supplied with liquor; the lower ranks had to make do with beer. In the civilian world liquor was rare and costly, however, for Dutch distillers had nothing in stock. What was available was mostly dubious stuff: raw rotgut at best, deadly poison at worst. In late June of 1945 four privates reportedly died in Utrecht as a result of drinking methylated spirits; five others were seriously ill.¹⁰ Two months later, in the aftermath of the accidental drowning of an inebriated Canadian soldier, Dutch police and excise officers raided five illegal stills and arrested 25 persons who had been active in the liquor trade. The potion they marketed was reported to be of "very inferior quality."¹¹

Canadians who had access to high-quality spirits could, if they wanted to, turn this to profitable use. "The black market prices in Amsterdam were fantastically high," the officer who served as head of the army's Amenities Control Committee in the capital told the court of inquiry. He had refrained from supplying the black market, but admitted to having sold bottles to fellow officers and to civilian members of the Amsterdam Entertainment Committee, at prices that reflected the low cost per glass charged in the messes. The practice may have been widespread: one commanding officer testified that officers commonly used liquor to obtain luxury items from civilians.¹²

Not only liquor was in demand among civilians. One officer testified that he had sold, in the black market, a portable typewriter, a radio, and even

underwear and socks in order to raise money for his wedding to a Dutch woman.¹³ Other officers could no doubt have added to this list. A few sold military supplies and equipment. Investigations in November and December turned up the names of two officers who had sold liquor, bedsheets, textiles, boots, soap, and other goods from army stocks. The 1946 court of inquiry found that a few enterprising souls had sold the occasional military vehicle!¹⁴

Although at the end of 1945 Queen Wilhelmina protested directly to the Canadian government against the alleged theft of works of art by soldiers,¹⁵ the incidence of theft from civilians seems to have been very low, at least after the liberation and, indeed, during the final campaign. This was in contrast with the experience in the south in the early autumn of 1944, where, according to one report: "The looting by American, British, and Canadian troops assumes frightful proportions. . . ." ¹⁶ Dutch protests to the SHAEF mission had the desired effect: incidents of this kind ended, and in the east, north, and center of The Netherlands, were limited to a few communities in the province of Groningen.¹⁷ It proved impossible to lay charges in these cases. However, Queen Wilhelmina's protest against art thefts led to a court martial in which two officers were convicted.¹⁸

Canadian dealings in the black market irritated civilians who felt that soldiers were profiting from Dutch poverty. But this was only one of several irritants, and not the most important. Another was the denial to civilians of sports fields, swimming pools, movie theatres, restaurants and cafes, schools, factories, and even private homes that had been commandeered for military use. This irritant was worsened by the slowness of repatriation. There was a shortage of transatlantic shipping; while they waited, the bulk of five divisions as well as many support services remained in The Netherlands. Of a total of some 170,000 Canadians, only 59,000 had left by the end of August.¹⁹ Soldiers wondered restlessly when their turn would come; civilians wondered how soon they might be able to reclaim facilities currently closed to them.

A far greater irritant proved to be the relations between servicemen and civilian women. In August a British intelligence report noted that this had already led to "several incidents of bitter public feeling" against Canadians, and that the sentiment

in the southern province of Limburg, where the troops were American, was much the same.

In several parts of the country a campaign is raging on the question of the threat to Dutch girlhood by the Allied armies. Venereal disease statistics are stated to show serious increases and the press are diligently plugging this point. . . . An expressed Dutch opinion is that Holland cannot be expected to pay for their liberation with the honour of their women.²⁰

Clearly some Netherlanders thought that the liberators were liberating too much.

Holland before the war was a male-dominated society, conservative in its codes of social and sex-

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ual behaviour.²¹ Christianity, in its Calvinist and Roman Catholic versions, had a strong influence, particularly in the small towns and the countryside. But the war loosened traditional controls. Restrictive mores continued to operate where the churches maintained their hold, as in rural Zeeland.²² Limburg and North Brabant women, or at least the urban dwellers among them, took the Allied soldiers more readily to their hearts. One consequence was that the number of illegitimate births in the city of Tilburg in 1945 was ten times what it had been in 1940.²³ It would be a serious exaggeration to say that contact between soldiers and civilian women always led to sexual intimacy. But Dutch moralists feared the worst.

The Canadian authorities also had fears. When the 3rd infantry division moved from Germany to The Netherlands, one officer thought he knew what lay ahead. "As a result of our move into friendly country it is expected that unless definite steps are taken to point out the dangers of V.D. this disease will increase."²⁴ "The army medical officers, and not they alone, were almost fanatical on the subjects of venereal disease and prophylaxis; condoms were issued to all men. Signs were also posted in recreation areas warning soldiers against V.D., leading naive Netherlanders to wonder what was the matter with Vroom & Dreesman, one of the country's larger department stores.

Civilians who blamed soldiers for the spread of sexually transmitted diseases ignored the fact that the sources were almost invariably Dutch. "Owing to lack of drugs for some time prior to our occupation of Western Holland, there is a very high incidence of venereal disease," an army report noted in May.²⁵ A public health official in Groningen told a joint military/civilian committee in August that from four known cases of syphilis in the area in 1939 the number had risen to 334 in 1944, the result of a deterioration in public health services and the civilian demoralization caused by the German occupation. A Canadian medical officer said that the soldiers infected in The Netherlands exceeded in number those infected in Italy and Belgium. Asked for an explanation he offered: "Perhaps it is because the Dutch and Canadians get along very well together!" He added that so far that month 252 infected soldiers had named 252 different women in the Groningen area as contacts, indicating if nothing else a high degree of exclusivity in sexual relations.²⁶

Other subjects at this meeting included the protection of minors, more particularly girls, and the issue of illegitimacy. The Canadians present warned that their government assumed no responsibility for the illegitimate offspring of servicemen and would not force the fathers to do so. It is noteworthy that there are no references to rape as a problem, neither in the records of this meeting nor elsewhere in the sources.

The civilian authorities in Groningen made occasional efforts to prevent women under 18 from attending military parties, but the Dutch police seem to have got little co-operation from the Canadian Provost forces.²⁷ There were also unofficial attempts to control the behavior of women, in Groningen and elsewhere. Not surprisingly the clergy played a major part in these.²⁸ The YMCA and an ad hoc group, the Christian Association of Friends of the Soldiers, sought to bring together soldiers and young women in a "wholesome" setting and under "proper" supervision. Their success was not great.

There were also exhortations of various kinds warning women not to throw themselves away. The title of a popular song was "Trees heeft een Canadees" ("Trish has a Canadian"); its tone was gently critical and it ended with the question how she would fare once her "boy" had returned to his home in Ottawa. Much sterner was a piece of dog-

gerel that did the rounds in the late summer: "Meisje, let op je zaak" ("Girl, look after yourself"). It took girls to task for selling themselves for a pack of cigarettes, a chocolate bar, a can of corned beef. What Dutch boy would look at them once the Canadians had left? In any event, Dutch boys appear to have been considerably more understanding than moralists thought they would be.

Some advice went beyond exhortations: there are reports on file in the Army Papers of threats that girls who became too friendly with Canadian soldiers would have their heads shaved.²⁹ This, of course, was the ad hoc punishment earlier administered to women who had consorted with German servicemen.

It is difficult to assess how much influence such warnings had on the behavior of women. Clearly many, especially in the cities, ignored them. Having assumed unprecedentedly important economic roles during the war, having been deprived of anything approaching a normal social life for months or even years, many women were little dissuaded by criticism. Besides, the Canadians were stalwart heroes, while most Dutch men were by comparison thin, weak, badly dressed, mostly poor, and altogether unattractive. At a conference on Dutch immigration held in Toronto in 1980, one war bride exclaimed: "Let's face it, after what we had been through the Canadians looked delicious!" A Canadian officer recalled: "There were many attractive young ladies around who showed great interest in us Canadians, and our parties — making up for lost time — were truly memorable events."³⁰ "A journalist's comment: "Dutch men were beaten militarily in 1940, sexually in 1945."³¹

That criticism focused on women is not surprising. It reflected traditional assumptions about appropriate behaviour. It also avoided the appearance of ingratitude to the liberators. But in some quarters these were contemplated with growing dismay. In August *Vrij Nederland*, which had started as a clandestine publication during the war, stated: "We will do anything for the Canadians. But our girls must stay away from them. We can't accept the risks. And we will praise God when the Canadians have gone back to Canada."³²

A more general resentment against servicemen found expression in occasional brawls between civilians and soldiers. The largest of these, in Utrecht in mid-September, involved 200 Canadians

and at least as many Netherlanders.³³ In its aftermath the Army's concern for Dutch public opinion sharpened. General Simonds said a month later that relations with the public were improving, but identified areas of continuing concern. First, too many soldiers were drunk while off duty. Secondly, "an element of the population resented the fact that civilian women were admitted to military recreational establishments but not civilian men." Thirdly, some civilians objected to the "habit of giving Canadian names to buildings and other properties taken over for the use of the troops." Finally, standards of dress and saluting were too lax, notably in the Apeldoorn and Nijmegen areas, and everywhere there was too much speeding by military vehicles.³⁴

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The Army command had been conscious of the need for good public relations ever since it became evident that repatriation would take time. On June 9th General Crerar predicted that the continued presence of soldiers would prove bothersome to the Dutch. "If friendly relations are to be maintained during this trying period, then every officer and man must conduct himself correctly. . . ." Offences against civilians were to be heavily punished and redressed whenever possible. It was in the interests of Canada, Crerar concluded, ". . . that all ranks are aware of the special responsibility now placed upon them . . . of so behaving that, when they leave Holland, they leave behind true and grateful friends, prepared to work in close harmony with Canada in the years to come."³⁵ In service of this objective, the Army regularly supplied the Dutch media with press releases emphasizing the positive side of the Canadian presence.

The most obvious manifestations of this were the use of soldiers in clearing war damage, especially damage to bridges and canals and where special equipment was needed that the local authorities did not have. This service proved to be welcome. Other soldiers helped to bring in the harvest. Care was taken not to do work that could be done by civilians. The Canadians who worked on farms were not paid by the farmers, who instead had to put the money they otherwise would have paid into a charitable fund administered by The Netherlands government.³⁶ There was a shortage of agricultural labour at the time;³⁷ the aid therefore should have been welcome. Yet it proved not acceptable everywhere.

A British intelligence report suggested that several communities had rejected harvest aid because of apprehension about the consequences for their women.³⁸

The greatest success seems to have been an inter-city bus service for civilians that was laid on in August. Rail service was still rudimentary and there was no civilian public transportation by road. A military bus service existed, but it was not open to civilians. Problems surrounding the question of liability in case of accidents delayed the project for some weeks; it was resolved by having passengers sign a release form as they got on. During the first six days a reported 52,000 people made use of the

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new opportunity to travel between a few of the major cities.³⁹ The service continued to be popular until it was discontinued in the late fall. By that time the Canadian presence had declined to the point where the necessary number of drivers was no longer available.

At a different level there were the social gatherings that various units put on for civilians. There were countless small functions in military clubs and messes as well as some big feasts. On Labor Day, September 3, 1945, the 2nd Infantry Division entertained 20,000 people at Soesterberg airfield near Utrecht. The festival included a circus, rodeo, horse show, midway, sports events and, in the evening, a dance.⁴⁰ Worth noting, too, are the St. Nicholas parties held by various units for Dutch children in 1944 and 1945.

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At the end of November there were fewer than 70,000 soldiers; a month later only 10,000 were left, most of whom departed in January. Some 2,000 Canadians remained until the spring; the Canadian headquarters in The Netherlands was disbanded on May 31, 1946. John Morgan Gray later wrote:

It was time to go. We had grown slack and we were wearing out our welcome. The smart, well-disciplined troops that had waved and smiled their way into Dutch hearts and

homes in the delirious weeks following VE Day had become just another Occupation Army, not hated yet, but standing in the way of a return to normal life in Holland. . . . A Nijmegen paper finally said in a resounding editorial what many had been muttering; the gist of it was, "Let them go home. We are grateful to them, but let them go home. We won't forget these nice, smiling boys, and they will always have our good wishes and our gratitude, but let them go home. They are not happy here and we are no longer happy to have them: so let them go home."⁴¹

The wish, Gray adds, was fervently shared by the soldiers.

When they had gone they were not forgotten, however. Their memory lingered, and they left human mementoes. We will never know with any accuracy the Canadian impact on the Dutch birth-rate. A joke doing the rounds in 1945 held that "in twenty years, when another world war may have broken out, it won't be necessary to send a Canadian expeditionary force to The Netherlands. A few ships loaded with uniforms should be enough." The reality doubtless fell short of this, but no one knows by how much. Illegitimate births exceeded 7,000 in 1946, roughly three times the number in 1939. Years later some of the children were making efforts to find their fathers: in the aftermath of the publication of the Dutch translation of *A Liberation Album* I received a few letters asking for assistance in these quests.

A major increase took place also in the number of legitimate births: 182,000 in 1940, no fewer than 277,000 in 1946. More than three decades later that was still the highest annual number of births in Dutch history.⁴² Some suspected it was here, rather than in the number of illegitimate births, that the Canadian presence really made itself felt, that many of the children born legitimately had Canadian fathers. The Dutch comedian Wim Kan later described the liberation as the time "when the Canadians threw out the Germans and supplied Dutch men with cigarettes, Dutch women with chocolate, and Dutch children with little brothers and sisters." Presumably Dutch men acquiesced in this. But jokes do not substitute for knowledge, and hard knowledge is not available.

Far more precise is the information available on war brides. Love flourished in 1945, and, in Frank Sinatra's words, for not a few men and women

"love and marriage [went] together like a horse and carriage." The Canadian government paid the passage to Canada of 1,886 Dutch war brides and 428 children.⁴³ This compares with 44,886 British war brides of Canadian servicemen, 649 Belgian, and 100 French. The Dutch contingent, though far smaller than the British, was easily the second largest. In addition, an unknown number of Dutch women married Canadians after 1946 as a result of their meeting each other during the Liberation period.

Not all the war brides actually came to Canada. A few of the marriages had already come apart before transportation could be arranged. Such instances doubtless confirmed the military authorities in the view that they had been wise to make marriage difficult. According to an official directive issued late in 1944: "The general policy is to dissuade members of the Canadian Army from marriage in foreign lands. Marriage with a person of a different country, particularly by young soldiers, . . . is open to obvious risks of future unhappiness. . . ." Commanding officers were instructed to refuse consent if they were "not satisfied that a reasonable basis for a happy marriage exists and in any event a four months' waiting period will be imposed between the date of the granting of permission to marry and the date on which the marriage may be solemnized, unless there are circumstances making the delay undesirable or unnecessary."⁴⁴ The prospective bride had to furnish a certificate of good character, usually from a clergyman. In addition, commanding officers had to get a certificate of the woman's political reliability from the Dutch authorities.⁴⁵

We cannot assert with authority that the impulse to marry came from the women rather than the men. The military authorities tended to this view, but their assessment was clouded by male-centered bias. One chaplain claimed that "there seems to be an undue haste on the part of Dutch girls to marry Canadians, and . . . this was also evident on the part of the parents, regardless of the fact that the soldier's background, etc., was entirely unknown to them."⁴⁶ But did the soldiers know much more about the women they wished to marry?

It is possible, nevertheless, that some of the women recognized that The Netherlands would be a long time recovering from the war. A new life in a young country, married to someone who

already had roots there: the notion may have had considerable appeal. Indeed, after ten years of economic depression and five of war, many Netherlanders were beginning to think of emigration. They were mostly from the lower socio-economic strata; so were a sample of Dutch war brides interviewed in 1977.⁴⁷ Of the group, fourteen were from a modest petit bourgeois background: the daughters of white-collar workers, shopkeepers, and the like. Twelve were definitely working class; ten more were probably working class. None was from a solid bourgeois or aristocratic family; none was from a farm-owning background. By themselves the interviews are not enough to substantiate the hypothesis that most of the war brides, being from social groups that had suffered great want and were still very poor, looked favorably on the opportunity to leave The Netherlands. But neither do they contradict it. Probably love and the desire to start a new life in a more promising country reinforced each other.

In the years after 1946 the idea of emigration occurred to many. It is possible to see the war brides as harbingers of a much larger movement. The post-war years were not easy: economic recovery, though real, proceeded slowly. The loss in 1948-49 of Indonesia sharpened the sense of limited opportunity, perhaps for the middle classes even more than for the agricultural and industrial working classes. Basic to the thoughts of many people who contemplated emigration was the belief that the "new world" offered greater opportunity than the old, if not to oneself then to one's children.

Those who actually made the difficult and wrenching decision to emigrate most frequently chose Canada as their destination. It was easier to enter than the quota-ridden United States, especially when by 1950 the Canadian government expanded its intake well beyond workers in the primary industries.⁴⁸ Before that year farm workers constituted the bulk of Dutch emigration to Canada; henceforth they were joined by growing numbers of industrial labourers, professional people (among them in 1952 my architect father) and white collar workers. And Canada was closer to Europe than Australia, New Zealand, or South Africa, though each of these drew emigrants. Important, too, was that as a result of the war and its aftermath Netherlanders felt they already knew something of Canada and the Canadians. It was the country where Princess (after 1948

Queen) Juliana and her daughters had found refuge; it was the home of the young men who had liberated most of The Netherlands. Canada might be large and have cold winters, but it conjured up a warm and friendly image. The war brides turned out to be the first small wave of a flood tide that by 1967 had brought some 165,000 Netherlanders to Canadian shores.

The country they left behind soon forgot the frictions of the liberation period. The resentments that had mounted during the summer and fall of 1945 faded. In retrospect those months came to be bathed in a rosy hue. T.S. Eliot writes, in *Murder in the Cathedral*, that "age and forgetfulness sweeten memory." They have done so in Holland. Relations between soldiers and civilians probably were as good as could have been expected under the circumstances. With the passage of time they came to seem much better than they had been.

Resentment has faded; gratitude has not, or not to the same extent. The years 1980, 1985, and 1990 have witnessed celebrations that echo the triumphant entry of Canadian and other Allied troops in 1944 and 1945. On each of those occasions hundreds of Canadian veterans and their spouses have visited The Netherlands, often with expenses paid, to be guests in a festival of thanksgiving. I have spoken to a few of these Canadians, and I know how greatly touched they are by the outpourings of affection. Like their hosts, they know that there was more to the liberation than cigarettes, sex, and chocolate.

NOTES

- 1 John Morgan Gray, *Fun Tomorrow* (Toronto, 1978) 310.
- 2 See: Michiel Horn and David Kaufman, *A Liberation Album: Canadians in The Netherlands 1944-45* (Toronto, 1980); Horn, "More than Cigarettes, Sex and Chocolate: The Canadian Army in The Netherlands, 1944 - 1945," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, XVI/3-4, Fall-Winter 1981: 156-73; Horn, "Canadian Soldiers and Dutch Women after the Second World War," *Dutch Immigration to North America*, Herman Ganzevoort and Mark Boekelman, eds. (Toronto, 1983) 187-96.
- 3 National Archives of Canada, R.G. 24, Army Papers (A.P.), 10,895, Capt. T.J. Allan, Report, OPS 1 CDN INF DIV, week ending May 12, 1945.
- 4 Marian Haayen, quoted in Horn and Kaufman, *A Liberation Album*, 117.
- 5 F.S.V. Donnison, *Civil Affairs and Military Government in North West Europe 1944-1946* (London, 1961) 151.
- 6 A.P., 10,668, General H.D.G. Crerar to All Commanders and Commanding Officers, Canadian Formations and Units, First Canadian Army, May 8, 1945.

- 7 A.P., 10,797, 3 Cdn Infantry Division, Royal Canadian Army Service Corps, War History.
- 8 In order to counter rumours that Canadian soldiers had been enabled to convert large sums just before currency reform, General Guy Simonds, Crerar's successor as Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian Forces in The Netherlands, thought it advisable to order that the Dutch press be officially informed: the Canadians had not had advance knowledge of the action. A.P., 10,566, Minutes of GOC's Conference, 15 Oct. 1945. L. de Jong writes that at the time of currency reform some 41 million guilders were held by Canadian agencies and servicemen, a debt forgiven in its entirety by the Canadian government. He does not make clear whether any of this amount was held illegally and, if so, how much. *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de tweede wereldoorlog*, 12, *Epiloog* (Den Haag, 1988) 327n.
- 9 A.P., 10,668, "Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry as to the Administration of the Canadian Military Forces in Holland," [1946] F49.
- 10 *Utrechts Katholiek Dagblad*, 27 June 1945, quoted in Koos Groen, "Er heerst orde en rust...": *Chaotisch Nederland tussen september 1944 en december 1945* (Nijmegen, 1979) 193.
- 11 A.P., 10,501, British Military Mission to The Netherlands, Fortnightly Report No. 4 for period ending Sept. 1945.
- 12 A.P., 10,668, 'Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry...', 114, 281.
- 13 *Ibid.* 131.
- 14 A.P., 10,614, Black Market Activities—100 Club, 26 Nov. 1945; Illegally disposing of W.D. property, 5 Dec. 1945; 10,668, 'Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry...', F51.
- 15 James Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada*, vol. 3 (Toronto, 1972) 189.
- 16 General H.J. Kruls, quoted in De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden...*, 10A, *Het laatste jaar I* (Den Haag, 1980) 580.
- 17 A.P., 10,738, "Behavior of Troops, Holland." 18 The records of courts martial were closed to me, but I was able to learn a good deal about some of them from other sources, notably the "Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry."
- 19 A.P., 10,566, 10,612, 10,614, *passim*.
- 20 A.P., 10,623, British Military Mission to The Netherlands Government, Fortnightly Report no. 2 for the Period Ending 15 Aug. 1945.
- 21 De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden...*, 1, *Voorspel* (Den Haag, 1969), hoofdstuk 4, "Een conservatief land."
- 22 See R.W. Thompson, *The Eighty-Five Days: The Story of the Battle of the Scheldt* (London, 1957) 208.
- 23 De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden...*, 10A, 578.
- 24 A.P., 10,797, War History 3 Cdn. Infantry Division, R.C.A.S.C.
- 25 A.P., 10,924, Prevention—Venereal Disease, 13 May 1945.
- 26 A.P., 10,950, Civil-Military Relations Committee, meeting of 21 Aug. 1945.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden...*, 10A, p. 578; Groen, "Er heerst orde en rust"..., 191-3.
- 29 A.P., 10,614, Minutes of Conference held by C of S/DA & QMG (Brig. J.F.A. Lister) with heads of services and advisors at HQ CDN Forces in The Netherlands, 26 July 1945.
- 30 Ben Dunkelman, *Dual Allegiance* (Toronto, 1976) 144-5.
- 31 Groen, "Er heerst orde en rust"..., 193.
- 32 J.J. Buskes Jr., "Daar komen de Canadeezen," *Vrij Nederland*, 11 Aug. 1945, reproduced in *De Gelderlander*, 22 Aug. 1945.
- 33 A.P., 10,925, Major-General R.H. Keebler to GOC-in-C, CFN, Report 18 Sept. 1945.
- 34 A.P., 10,566, Minutes of GOC's Conference, 15 Oct. 1945.
- 35 A.P., 10,507, Gen. H.D.G. Crerar to all Canadian Commanders and Commanding Officers, 1st Cdn. Army, 9 June 1945.
- 36 A.P., 10,950, Civ. Aid to the Dutch, 21 July 1945; Lt. Col. G.F. Levenston, "Volunteer Labour on Farms." See also: Afwikkelingsbureau Militair Gezag, *Overzicht der werkzaamheden van het militair gezag gedurende de bijzondere staat van beleg, 14 september 1944—4 maart 1946* (Den Haag, 1947) 43.
- 37 De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden...*, 12, 276.
- 38 A.P., 10,623, British Military Mission to The Netherlands Government, Fortnightly Report No. 2 for the Period ending 15 Aug. 1945.
- 39 A.P., 10,614, Minutes of a Conference held by C of S/DA & QMG (Brig. J.F.A. Lister) with heads of services and advisors at HQ Cdn Forces in The Netherlands, 30 Aug. 1945. For a copy of the release form see: 10,920, file D29.
- 40 For the plans, see: A.P., 10,916, Minutes of meeting, 2 Cdn Inf Div, 10 August 1945.
- 41 Gray, *Fun Tomorrow*, 328.
- 42 Groen, "Er heerst orde en rust"..., 195.
- 43 Joyce Hibbert, ed., *The War Brides* (Toronto, 1978) 156.
- 44 A.P., 10,507, Permission to Marry—NW Europe, 15 Dec. 1944.
- 45 A.P., 10,507, Security Vetting of Alien Marriage Applications, 21 Nov. 1945.
- 46 A.P., 10,950, Civil-Military Relations Committee, 21 Aug. 1945, 3.
- 47 The 36 interviews, which were carried out by Ms. Nancy Jones under the author's supervision and under the general auspices of the Multicultural History Society of Ontario, are on file at the Society. The interviews are not a random sample, but they do constitute approximately two percent of Dutch war brides.
- 48 Freda Hawkins, *Canada and Immigration* (Montreal and London, 1972) 99.