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The Hunger Winter: Occupied Holland 1944-1945



Synopsis

Germany invaded the Netherlands in the spring of 1940. Life in occupied Holland was hideous enough, but for the Dutch the worst was yet to come. After the Western Allies lost the Battle of Arnhem in September 1944, the Dutch provinces north of the Rhine and Waal Rivers were in the hands of the Germans, and to the south fighting raged for months. In the winter of 1944-45, just as other parts of Europe were being liberated, the Dutch seemed forsaken by the Allies, who bypassed Holland on their drive to Berlin. That last winter of the war, with its severe food and fuel shortages, was a terrible one for the Dutch people, who also suffered from episodes of Nazi terrorism. In some provinces there was nothing to eat but tulip bulbs and sugar beets, and eighteen thousand Dutch civilians actually starved to death. Henri van der Zee, who was ten years old that winter, remembers what happened to his people.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The Hunger Winter" by Henri A. van der Zee. Subtitled: "Occupied Holland 1944-1945" University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1982. This book is written in understated prose. Atrocities, shootings, retaliation arrests and slow starvation are all described in a matter-of-fact, quiet writing. The author, Henri A. van der Zee, was a Dutch boy of eleven years during much of the events recorded here. As brief as it is, the book is a fairly complete documentation of the struggle of the Dutch nation in the last winter of World War II. In September 1944, the great airborne assault, "Market Garden", failed at the last bridge before Germany. Hopes of the Dutch for a quick and easy liberation were dashed. The Dutch hopes were replaced by the despair of drawn-out starvation, mainly due to the inhumane

actions and inactions of the German occupiers. Since the author, Henri A. van der Zee, actually lived through this "hunger winter", the book is filled with his personal reflections. But these personal reflections are interspersed through a substantially complete history of the times. The author describes attempts to cook both sugar beets and tulip bulbs to make these "vegetables" palatable to the starving Dutch children. He also describes their taste. The author spends a substantial portion of the book on the Dutch royal family, and how they tried, as best they could, to alleviate the suffering of their Dutch people. Queen Wilhelmina is the central character in that "governmental" aspect of the period, with good mention of the Dutch Prime Minister, Peter S. Gerbrandy. Winston Churchill called Gerbrandy, "Mr. Cherry Brandy", (p.35).

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