Patriots without a Country: Dutch Wings over Jackson

by Amanda Lyons and Will Morgan

Few could have guessed that Adolf Hitler's aggression in Europe and Japan's expansion into Asia would directly result in social changes in a southern state of the U.S.A. But after the Nazi blitzkrieg and the armies of the Rising Sun had overrun the Netherlands and its empire, citizens from the small nation and its colonies would find themselves in Mississippi, where many would start families and spend the rest of their lives.

More than 267,000 Mississippians served during World War II, and tens of thousands came to the state to train at its military bases. Despite shortages and rationing, Mississippians enthusiastically contributed to the war effort. The arrival of the Dutch fliers in May 1942 opened a new outlet for those' patriotic energies. With their sons and husbands fighting overseas, Mississippians adopted the foreign trainees as their own. The state became a safe haven during the Dutchmen's long and dangerous journey and provided a much-needed rest between battles.[1]

The Dutch flying school in Jackson supplied highly trained air force personnel to America's allies in Europe and the Pacific. The trainees contributed to the war effort and promoted good will and cooperation between the Netherlands and the United States, forging bonds that would not be easily broken.[2]

[1] Westley F. Busbee Jr., *Mississippi: A History* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2005), 261–64.

[2] Gerald T. White, "Training of Foreign Nationals by the AAF: 1939–1945,"

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The Dutch fliers' story is one of bravery, self-reliance, and sacrifice, but this chapter of Mississippi's history is largely unknown. Only two operational histories have been published—both in Dutch without English translations. The story stretches from the precarious peace between the World Wars to the bloody Indonesian Insurrection and back to Mississippi. Though they were always anxious to get back into the fight, the Dutchmen who trained at Hawkins Field in Jackson did not simply pass through. They were patriots without a country, but for a time, Jackson was their home … and they left their mark. Their experiences respresent a love story written in the memory of those who lived it and penned in the remembrance of those whom history left behind—a narrative of the love affair between Jackson and the Dutch.

In May 1942, Dutch airmen and their families began arriving in Jackson. These Dutch army and navy aviators were refugees from the war in Europe and the Japanese invasion of the Netherlands East Indies. When Nazi Germany invaded the Netherlands on May 10, 1940, Dutch citizens fled for the countryside, intermingling with retreating British troops, which endangered the civilian evacuees. Mary Staal remembered the evacuation, saying, "We were all herded exactly as you see on the old documentaries … just walking along the roads being strafed by screaming Stukas all the time." Staal and her parents survived the war, but her two young brothers were killed during the evacuation.[3] The Netherlands fell quickly, surrendering after only five days of military resistance. The Dutch royal family fled to London and set up a government in exile. Senior military leadership went with them, but the few fighting men left rejoined the Dutch armed forces gathering in England, the Netherlands East Indies, and later, the United States.[4]

Sixteen-year-old Jan Veenstra and two childhood friends chafed un-

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Army Air Forces Historical Studies, no. 64 (Army Air Forces Headquarters: Air Historical Office, 1947), p 88, 97, accessed October 12, 2012, http://www.afhra.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-090601-033.pdf.

[3] Michael J. Lyons, *World War II: A Short History*, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004), 88; Mary Staal, interview by the authors (telephone), May 2, 2012, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS (hereafter MDAH).

[4] Lyons, *World War II: A Short History*, 88; Walter B. Maass, *The Netherlands at War: 1940–1945* (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1970), 33, 88–89.

der German occupation, secretly listening to "Radio Oranje" broadcasts that encouraged Dutch citizens to join the Allies in England. "This put a bug in my ears," Veenstra wrote. Their escape from Holland became a two-year odyssey ending in Jackson.[5]

The trio started October 27, 1941, crossing into Belgium and then German-occupied France on their way to Switzerland, where they hoped to find passage to England. On the advice of a Frenchman the friends decided to cross into unoccupied Vichy France. "We were told that once you arrived in Switzerland, you had no chance to leave," Veenstra wrote. "Since we wanted to go to England, we took [his] advice."[6]

Jan Veenstra, courtesy Jacob Veenstra.

Veenstra and his friends successfully crossed the border on their second attempt but were arrested and jailed when they were unable to present proper travel documents. Veenstra spent seven weeks in a French prison before being freed by a Dutch consular official. He and his friends were arrested again and spent another three months in prison and then a labor camp. Veenstra's health suffered. He wrote, "I became weak and was very afraid I would die from starvation and freezing cold weather." On April 23, 1942, the three were transferred by train to another prison. During one stop, they marched at the end of the column of prisoners. "We slowed our pace just enough so that the guards got a little ahead of us," Veenstra said. "Then, when we reached a side street, we quickly darted [away]."[7]

With the help of Dutch friends, they secured passports from the Swedish consulate in September 1942 and traveled through neutral Spain, Portugal, and Dutch Curacao to Canada, where they joined the

[5] Jan Veenstra, *The Escape: A True Story* (Concord, CA: Amazing Experiences Press, 1993), 2.

[6] Ibid., 5–6, 9–10, 12.

[7] Ibid., 13–16, 19, 21–26.

Dutch military. After Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands visited the base and encouraged him to become a pilot, Veenstra joined the Dutch air forces in Jackson during the month of February 1943. Like Veenstra, other Dutch fliers traversed half the globe to reach Mississippi, but their journey began in the Netherlands East Indies.[8]

Since the seventeenth century, the Dutch people had maintained a significant presence in Southeast Asia. Their government eventually took control of a collection of islands and named them the Netherlands East Indies, a tropical archipelago that is now the nation of Indonesia.

Beginning with the attacks on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the Japanese launched a series of offensives against Europe's remote colonial outposts throughout the Pacific. Because of inadequate defenses, outdated equipment, and unimaginative Dutch commanders, Japanese forces faced little resistance. With invasion imminent, the Dutch military in the Indies evacuated personnel (a mixture of Dutch, Indonesian, and Chinese cadets) and equipment to nearby Australia.[9]

Student-pilot Charles "Dick" Schillmoller escaped the Netherlands East Indies on a troop ship, the *Boissevain*, with other army aviators. He said, "The ship probably took ten days to get there [Australia]. We didn't do much. We were just sitting on the deck, and we were eating in shifts because the kitchen was not equipped to handle a large number of people. So we were either washing equipment or eating or doing nothing." Navy pilots arrived in Australia after a similar journey on the *Tjinagara*.[10]

Civilian evacuees found other ways off the islands. Johanna "Jopie" Peters-Jansen had come to the Indies as a child. She married army pilot Gerret Hendrik Grijsen in Sumatra in December 1941. Grijsen evacuated with the military, but Johanna had to find her own passage. Peters-Jansen and two others escaped as deck passengers on a ship packed with refugees. "We bought these mattresses that you could roll

[8] Ibid., 28–31; telegram, "Berend Jan Veenstra," military service record, copy provided to authors by Jacob Veenstra, Hickory, MS.

[9] Lyons, *World War II: A Short History*, 167; Andries Christiaan Bakker, "Memoirs from World War II," unpublished manuscript (c. 2002), p. 5, copy provided to authors by Andrea Perkins, Clinton, MS.

[10] Charles Schillmoller, interview by the authors, Clearwater, FL, September 20, 2012, MDAH; Jan Staal, "Jackson," unpublished manuscript, copy provided to authors by Mary Staal, New Zealand (translated for the authors by Carol and Antonius Rietvelt), 2.

Charles Schillmoller, courtesy Charles Schillmoller.

up and a big tin of cream crackers, and we went on board," she said. "We didn't go in a straight line to Australia, we zig-zagged. It took us a long time, I think about twelve or thirteen days to reach Perth." She rejoined her husband in Adelaide and later travelled with him to Mississippi.[11]

Meanwhile, Japanese troops began landing on the islands of the Netherlands East Indies on January 11, 1942. Ten Allied ships were sunk and many more aircraft were lost in defense of the colony, and the Dutch government surrendered on March 8.[12]

The Dutch air forces arriving in Australia hoped to complete their training and quickly rejoin the fight, but equipment shortages, lack of adequate facilities, and fear of a Japanese invasion forced the Dutch to look elsewhere for a training base. In Washington, D.C., Dutch diplomats requested the use of an air base in the American South because its mild winters would accommodate flying with an open cockpit in all seasons. The Jackson Army Air Base at Hawkins Field was selected as their new home—most likely because its previous occupants, the 21st, 309th, and

[11] Johanna Peters-Jansen, interview by the authors, Jackson, MS, October 8, 2012, MDAH.

[12] Max Hastings, *Inferno: The World at War, 1939–1945* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 214; Lyons, *World War II: A Short History*, 167.

310th Bomber Groups, had recently departed for combat.[13]

The Dutch fliers boarded the SS *Mariposa* in Melbourne and sailed via Hawaii for San Francisco. "It was a big, old passenger ship that had been converted to a troop ship," air gunner Andries "Harry" Bakker wrote. "This ship was fast enough to outrun submarines so we were able to sail from Adelaide to Hawaii in a straight line." Jopie Peters-Jansen, sailing with her husband, Gerret Grijsen, said, "I was very, very seasick. It was terrible. That trip was terrible." After several days rest in San Francisco, the Dutch group boarded a train for Jackson. Bakker wrote, "I remember that it was a long trip from California. For three mornings, we woke up to find out that we were still in Texas."[14]

The group of 688 airmen and their families arrived in Jackson on May 8, 1942. Bette Barber, a local reporter, wrote, "Saturday morning the town woke up to the fact that there had been some sort of a foreign invasion in the night." However, the Dutch people were warmly welcomed by Jackson's sixty-thousand citizens. Bakker wrote, "We took the town by storm, and the people responded by taking us into their homes, entertaining us, feeding us, and doing everything possible to make us feel right at home."[15]

Mississippian Marjorie Brooks worked as a clerk at the Jackson Army Air Base. She caught her first glimpse of the city's foreign visitors while carpooling to work. "We were coming in the front gate," she remembered, "and we saw all these tall, tan, good-looking guys in shorts and knee socks, and different type of uniforms … we had never seen anything like that in our lives … it was pretty exciting."[16]

Married couples were allowed to find their own housing, and Dutch children were enrolled in local schools. Single cadets were housed on

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[13] Kathryn M. Kuranda, Hugh B. McAloon, and Leo Hirrel, *Architectural and Historical Investigations for Four Former Defense Sites in Mississippi* (Vicksburg, MS: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1994), 30, in Historic Preservation Division files, MDAH.

[14] Bakker, "Memoirs from World War II," 6; Peters-Jansen, interview.

[15] White, "Training of Foreign Nationals by the AAF," 31; Bette E. Barber, "It Is Suggested May 8 Be Observed As Special Day in Jackson Marking 11th Anniversary of Big 'Invasion,'" *Jackson Daily News*, April 12, 1953; Jackson population, 1940 US Census, Family Search, accessed June 7, 2013, https://familysearch.org/ 1940census /1940-census-mississippi/; and Bakker, "Memoirs from World War II," 7.

[16] Marjorie Helfrich, interview by the authors, Bolton, MS, February 29, 2012, MDAH.

base. "We were billeted at Jackson Airbase in comfortable barracks," student-pilot Rudolf Idzerda wrote. They sweltered during the hot summers without air conditioning, but "in those days we didn't know any better."[17]

With so many foreigners in residence, the city took on "the exciting flavor of a wartime capital." While this period saw massive troop movements and population shifts, Mississippi's international group was unique, not for their origin or numbers—other nations also sent flight students to the United States—but for the fact that these allies were refugees. Indeed, though they were handsome, well-paid strangers who fascinated locals, the Dutch were patriots without a country. Their dire circumstance won the sympathy and support of Jacksonians.[18]

Andries Bakker, courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

The Dutch people brought their unique culture and customs to Jackson. They played hockey with no ice. They ate strange Indonesian food. They formed a soccer team that played at Millsaps and faced off against out-of-state teams. One of their goals, according to a Dutchman, was to "show Jackson citizens how football soccer is really played." In 1943, the combined Dutch–Indonesian team played an "international soccer match" in St. Louis, Missouri. Though they were dressed in shabbier uniforms, the Dutch players were more skilled and soundly defeated the Americans. The score was quite lopsided by half-time. Instructor

[17] "Dutch Families Are Being Placed in Their New Homes," *Clarion-Ledger*, May 12, 1942; Rudolf J. Idzerda, *Adventures of a Flying Dutchman*, trans. Antoinette Idzerda (Bognor Regis, UK: Woodfield Publishing, 2006), 54.

[18] *Mississippi History Newsletter* 24, no. 2 (April 1982); White, "Training of Foreign Nationals by the AAF," 10–11, 16, 28–30, 36, 164–65.

Jan Staal wrote, "The sports officer spoke to the Indonesian players and asked them to work it so that the American team could score a point. That would be nicer in consideration of the friendship among Allies. The team did its best, but still the Americans couldn't find the Indonesian goal." The soccer team donated proceeds from its games to charitable causes, such as the Red Cross and the Queen Wilhelmina Fund.[19]

The people of Jackson shared their customs, too, often inviting the Dutchmen over for a Sunday meal in their homes. The Jackson Country Club opened its doors to Dutch families. Staal wrote, "Those luxurious facilities were offered by the good members of the board free to Allied fighter evacuees." They enjoyed Mississippi's milder climate and spent many weekends there with their families. The Dutchmen learned to play golf at the club's course and hosted underwater football games in the swimming pool.[20]

Sinterklaas distributes presents to Dutch children, courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

In December, Jacksonians were introduced to a cherished Dutch tradition: the annual visit of Sinterklaas—a figure similar to the American Santa Claus—and his helper, Black Pete. Legend has it that Sinterklaas gives good children a present, but Black Pete is said to kidnap the bad ones in his sack and carry them off to Spain.

On December 4, 1942, Sinterklaas arrived in Jackson (by plane instead of in his storied boat) and was received by the air base's American commander and his staff. On December 5, the traditional Sinterklaas Day, he processed through the air base and was

[19] "Dutch Fliers to Play Soccer in St. Louis, Mo.," *Jackson Army Air Base News*, March 20, 1943; "Dutch Personnel Give $800 Check to American Red Cross," *Jackson Army Air Base News*, May 8, 1943; and Staal, "Jackson," 10.

[20] Barber, "May 8 Be Observed as Special Day"; Lucille Gainey, interview by the authors, Jackson, MS, August 16, 2012, MDAH; and Staal, "Jackson," 7–8.

met by the Dutch commander. Sinterklaas then gave presents to excited children at the base auditorium while their parents gathered for their own party later in the evening.[21]

Many of the Dutchmen who had been raised in the cosmopolitan colony of the Netherlands East Indies, were astonished by the strict system of racial segregation in 1940s Mississippi. P.W. Burgemeestre said, "I never had any contact with segregation until I really came to the South." Jan Staal attempted to drive his black housekeeper home, but to his surprise, he had to leave her on the outskirts of the black neighborhood, even in inclement weather. Rudolf Idzerda wrote that the dark skin color of some cadets "initially caused some resistance among the local population until they had been convinced that [the cadets] were not 'niggers.'" However, there is no other documented or anecdotal evidence to suggest that Indonesian servicemen were treated any differently than the full-blooded Dutch. They were all granted the same privileges as whites in the state's capital. But, within the school itself, Indonesian cadets faced caste-based barriers. Trainees who were half-Dutch were allowed to test as pilots, but those with more Indonesian blood were limited to other jobs.[22]

With Jackson's own sons already off to war, the Dutch cadets found themselves in a city full of available young women. There were dances at the USO, including a "Welcome the Dutch Fliers Dance" held soon after their arrival. Guillaume "Bill" Marchant met his future wife, Jacqueline Mullins, there. The more outgoing Dutch fliers soon had dates, and they went to the movies, to restaurants, or out swimming. Some couples even snuck onto the air base to watch the planes come and go, taking along a bag of Krystal hamburgers, Coca-Colas, and a radio.[23]

Dick Schillmoller and his friends went into the city every day after they completed their training duties at five o'clock. "We often had snacks and milkshakes and things, and we approached some of the girls there," he remembered. The girls "suggested we come to their home on

[21] "Sinterklaas Arrives; Visits Dutch at Base," *Jackson Daily News*, December 5, 1942.

[22] P. W. Burgemeestre, interview by Katherine Kraft, October 4, 1978, Katherine Kraft Collection, no. 343, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University; Mary Staal, interview; Idzerda, *Adventures of a Flying Dutchman*, 54; and Gerard Casius, email message to authors, October 13, 2012.

[23] Edward Marchant, interview by the authors, Jackson, MS, March 27, 2012, MDAH; Helfrich, interview; and Gainey, interview.

Dutchmen socializing with local young women. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

the weekend, and they would put on the barbeque, and that was very nice." To signify romantic attachments, the pilots often gave a pair of Dutch wings to local women. Schillmoller said, "If you walked on the street, you could see from a distance which girl [was] available and which [was] not."[24]

That fall, Jackson celebrated the first wedding of a Dutchman to a local girl. Inazelle Pierce was the daughter of a prominent Jackson attorney and former assistant state attorney general. She wed Lieutenant Pieter van Erkel on September 12, 1942, at Galloway Memorial Methodist Church in "one of the outstanding events of the fall season."[25]

Harry Bakker met Gena Kate Brister on a blind date in Jackson on Christmas Eve, 1942. He wrote, "We went dancing and had a good time that night. I liked her very much from the beginning. We made a date

[24] Schillmoller, interview.

[25] "Brilliant September Rites Will Unite Miss Pierce, Lieutenant Pieter Van Erkel," *Jackson Daily News*, August 23, 1942; "Brilliant Ceremony Unites Inazelle Pierce, Lt. Pieter J.P. van Erkel," *Jackson Daily News*, September 13, 1942.

for the next night, but something happened, and I didn't have her phone number." Bakker eventually got the number, and the two dated for three months before marrying at Galloway on March 25, 1943.[26]

Gena Kate and Harry Bakker, courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Dutch airmen were supposed to request permission from headquarters before marrying, but some were wed in secret nuptials. Jan Veenstra and Willowdeen Newell also met on a blind date. "They had wonderful manners," Newell said of the Dutchmen. "They knew how to treat a lady." The two sought permission to marry but were denied. At ages eighteen and fifteen (though Newell claimed she was seventeen), they were thought too young. However, Veenstra and Newell did not want to wait until after the war, so they enlisted the help of another Dutch-American couple and wed on December 3, 1943, in Brandon, Mississippi.[27]

Air base employee Marjorie Brooks met her future husband, Jan Helfrich, during a birthday party at the Rotisserie restaurant. She was dating a different cadet at the time, but he was transferred to another air base for further training. The Dutch always left their girlfriends in the care of another Dutchman, so after he left, Brooks began dating Gerry van Schieveen, and her friend dated Helfrich.[28]

The two men were very close. Helfrich was already in advanced training to be a fighter pilot, but Van Schieveen was still training under the direction of Pieter van Erkel, Inazelle Pierce's new husband.[29]

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[26] Bakker, "Memoirs from World War II," 7–8.

[27] Willowdeen Veenstra Broadaway, interview by the authors, Jackson, MS, May 21, 2012, MDAH; Willowdeen Newell Veenstra Broadaway, "After 'The Escape': The Missing Years" (manuscript addition to Veenstra, *The Escape*), 1, copy provided to authors by Jacob Veenstra, Hickory, MS.

[28] Helfrich, interview.

[29] Ibid.

On December 1, 1942, Van Schieveen and Van Erkel were practicing take-offs and landings at the Vicksburg airport. Soon after one take-off, a strong gust of wind hit the aircraft and flipped it over, causing it to crash and burst into flames. Both men were killed in the accident. Inazelle Pierce and Pieter van Erkel had been married less than three months. At an air base ceremony on December 21, she was awarded her husband's Dutch Flying Cross for his bravery in battle over Java. Brooks and Helfrich grew closer after Van Schieveen's death.[30]

While their evenings were spent enjoying all that Jackson had to offer, the Dutch fliers spent their days training for war. The Royal Netherlands Military Flying School at the Jackson Army Air Base was directed by Dutch instructors but placed under the jurisdiction of the United States Southeast Training Center. Major General L.H. van Oyen commanded the military flying school with the assistance of Colonel Conrad Giebel.[31]

When General Van Oyen arrived in Jackson, he immediately held a press conference. Pushing a pin into a map, he pointed at the Indonesian city of Bandung and said, "There's where my home is and there's where I want to be. When we've finished our training I hope we are sent back there so we can help kick the Japs to hell!"[32]

Van Oyen got his chance on September 1, 1943, when he was promoted to lieutenant general and appointed commander-in-chief of the Royal Netherlands Indies Army. By October, he was in Australia, forming air units for Allied offensives in Southeast Asia. Colonel Giebel stayed behind and took his place as head of the school in Jackson.[33]

Many of the cadets were already veterans of combat over the Indies and traveled to Jackson simply to complete their training, but others had only just begun learning to fly. The distribution of personnel from

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[30] "Two Dutch Fliers Killed in Crash at Local Airport," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, December 2, 1942; "Dutch Fliers Killed as Plane Crashes, Burns," *Jackson Daily News*, December 1, 1942; "Plane Crash Claims Two Local Air Base Men; Burned to Death in Takeoff at Vicksburg Field," *Clarion-Ledger*, December 2, 1942; and "Dutch Honored as Van Mook Makes Awards at Base," *Jackson Daily News*, December 21, 1942.

[31] White, "Training of Foreign Nationals by the AAF," 32; 1st Lt. R. van der Laan, *Royal Netherlands Military Flying School in United States of America* (New York, NY: E.W. Smith Company, 1943), 24, MDAH.

[32] "Gen. Van Oyen Given Promotion," *Jackson Daily News*, October 20, 1943.

[33] "Jackson-to-Java Visits Planned," *Jackson Daily News*, October 7, 1943; "Gen. Van Oyen Given Promotion"; and "Gen. Van Oyen in Australia as Chief of Army," *Jackson Daily News*, October 29, 1943.

General L.H. van Oyen (second from left) reviews the airmen in Jackson. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

each service was uneven. Army personnel outnumbered navy two-to-one, with 452 people (including family members) from the army traveling on the *Mariposa* compared to only 236 from the navy. Army airman Jan Staal wrote, "The Navy [left the Indies] with many instructors and only a few students. The Army with only a few instructors and hundreds of students." To the chagrin of army cadets, the school shifted toward naval customs because of this imbalance. "The Navy insisted on 'rowing' to the hangar," Staal recorded.[34]

While the Dutch program focused primarily on training pilots, it also operated under a system of forced elimination, which allowed the eliminees to be instructed in other aircrew specialties. "Here a difficult and delicate problem arose," instructor Rene Wittert van Hoogland said. "Not one single student would willingly give up his pilot training." The students anxiously awaited the posting of a "washed-out" list. Unfortunately, the instructors often made arbitrary decisions, making it difficult to maintain discipline and morale. Student-pilot Willem Bakhuys

[34] SS *Mariposa*, California Passenger and Crew Lists (May 1942), Ancestry.com; Staal, "Jackson," 2.

Dutchmen training on the PT-19A in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Courtesy Charles Schillmoller.

Roozeboom wrote, "At the end of the third month came the dreadful day when the names of those who had been 'Washed Out' [were] posted on the bulletin board. Having a double last name made my agony last longer. I looked first under the 'B's' and my name was not there, then under the 'R's' and it was not there either. I had survived."[35]

In mid-May, the United States Army granted the Dutch the use of Sherman Field in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, for primary training. The cadets learned to fly on the open-cockpit Fairchild PT-19A. Dick Schillmoller recalled, "We enjoyed flying it when it was summer, but when the winter was started, we had to put so many clothes on. It was impossible to fly."[36]

Bakhuys Roozeboom, a Dutch emigrant, traveled from Canada to join the school. His instructor at Fort Leavenworth was a small man but extremely tough-minded. He was a "fairly hard taskmaster as a matter

[35] Rene Wittert van Hoogland, *Het Vergeten Squadron* [*The Forgotten Squadron*] (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij T. Wever B. V. Franeker, 1983), ch. 3, MDAH (selections translated for the authors by Carol and Antonius Rietvelt); Willem Bakhuys Roozeboom, *Through My Viewfinder* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2011), 15.

[36] O.G. Ward, P.C. Boer, and G.J. Casius, *The Royal Netherlands Military Flying School, 1942–1944* ([Netherlands]: Uitgave afdeling Maritieme Historie van de Marinestaf, n.d.), 44–45, MDAH; Schillmoller, interview.

of fact. He hung onto me for longer than I wanted. … I had about nine and a half hours before I soloed, and everybody else was soloing at five, six, and seven." After racking up thirty or forty flight hours, Bakhuys Roozeboom and another cadet staged an impromptu dogfight over downtown Kansas City. "To this day I don't know who led whom, but we suddenly found ourselves chasing each other in a figure eight, at about the tenth story level, around these two hotels," he wrote. They did two or three full turns around the hotel towers. Bakhuys Roozeboom said, "That was probably the stupidest thing I ever did in my flying career." Luckily, the crowd of onlookers was too shocked to note his plane's wing numbers, so he escaped an official reprimand.[37]

All personnel at Fort Leavenworth were housed on the base. "We had a food store there, and we did our own cooking. And we had a very pleasant time," Jopie Peters-Jansen recalled. "We didn't stay very long in Kansas … and then we went on to Jackson, Mississippi."[38]

The Dutch left Fort Leavenworth in October, but not without burying a casualty. Before abandoning the base, they staged an air parade for the locals. Forty students nearly froze to death and had to be carried out of their open cockpits. The Dutchmen returned to Jackson by car "since everyone had by now managed to get hold of a second-hand vehicle," Rudolf Idzerda wrote. "We drove in a convoy of about ten cars, and being an officer, I was put in charge of one of these convoys."[39]

Basic and advanced training were conducted in Jackson, while cadets in aircrew specialties were sent to other bases. Unlike those in pilot training, these Dutchmen were instructed at United States Army Air Force installations under standard American guidelines. Bombardiers were stationed at Midland, Texas, gunners at Tyndall Field in Florida, navigators at Brooks Field in Texas, and radiomen at Scott Field in Illinois or Sioux Falls, South Dakota. American fliers often piloted crew-training missions, requiring the Dutch personnel to use and understand English as well as their native language.[40]

Each day of training in Jackson was divided into two-hour segments.

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[37] Willem Bakhuys Roozeboom, interview by the authors (Skype), September 7, 2012, MDAH; Bakhuys Roozeboom, *Through My Viewfinder*, 15.

[38] Peters-Jansen, interview.

[39] Speech given at 1982 reunion in Jackson, copy provided to the authors by Marjorie Helfrich, Bolton, MS; Idzerda, *Adventures of a Flying Dutchman*, 54.

[40] Ward, Boer, and Casius, *The RNMFS*, 279; Doug Hurst, *The Fourth Ally: The Dutch Forces in Australia in WWII* (n.p., 2001), 93.

There were two hours of actual flying and associated briefings. Then sessions on "things such as taking machine guns apart and oiling them, folding parachutes, pistol practice, rifle practice, [and] drills," Jan Staal wrote, as well as "tinkering with engines, bombs, pipes, tires, signals, welding, moving planes around, and other unexpected odd jobs." Physical exercise and classroom instruction filled out the schedule. Both the instructors and students preferred flying to sitting in lecture halls. The instructors "didn't care much for lecturing us," Dick Schillmoller recalled. "So they gave us frequent exams, and the results were so bad that [the instructor] said, 'We have to do something.'" The students agreed. Schillmoller said, "'You … gave us the questions, but you didn't give us the answers.'"[41]

Operational training for all cadets was held in Jackson beginning in February 1943 after the first B-25 bombers arrived on base. P-40 Kittyhawk fighters were delivered in May for those training as pursuit pilots. Rudolf Idzerda remembered learning to fly the P-40. "It was a real experience to fly the Curtis P40 Kittyhawk fighter. … There was no two-seater version, which meant that you went solo straight away. Naturally you first had to practice extensively letting down and retracting landing gear and flaps, and under supervision of an instructor, identify all the cockpit instruments and point them out blindfolded."[42]

Gunnery training in Florida rounded out the course. "Practices for both fighters and bombers consisted of shooting .50 caliber machine guns and dropping bombs," Rene Wittert wrote. "The fighters practiced dive bombing, the B-25s skip bombing and launching torpedoes." The students practiced marksmanship by aiming for a target towed by another plane. They also honed their skills at the skeet-shooting range. Willem Bakhuys Roozeboom, a shooting ace from a childhood spent hunting small game, remembered meeting actor Clark Gable, his guest instructor.[43]

Gable watched Bakhuys Roozeboom on the range. "I recorded a perfect twenty-four out of twenty-four on my first round at the skeet [range], and he asked me how long I'd been shooting skeet. And I said, 'This is the first time.'" Shocked, Gable "challenged me to a shoot-out

[41] Staal, "Jackson," 1; Schillmoller, interview.

[42] Ward, Boer, and Casius, *The RNMFS*, 249, 256; Idzerda, *Adventures of a Flying Dutchman*, 57.

[43] Wittert, *Het Vergeten Squadron*, ch. 3; Idzerda, *Adventures of a Flying Dutchman*, 56; and Bakhuys Roozeboom, interview.

Charles Schillmoller and Bill Marchant (third and fourth from left), courtesy Charles Schillmoller.

for a bottle of Scotch," Bakhuys Roozeboom wrote. They both hit every target, so Gable called it a draw, and they enjoyed the Scotch together.[44]

Jackson's first official graduation ceremony was held on February 13, 1943, at the city auditorium where 130 Dutch, Indonesian, and Chinese cadets were awarded their wings. Sixty fliers graduated the next month and were honored with a speech by the Dutch ambassador to the United States, Dr. Alexander Loudon. Before graduating, these men had undergone a rigorous cross-country flight, testing their skills along a nine-day, 4,500-mile trip plagued with severe weather.[45]

One hundred sixty-five fliers graduated in another ceremony on July 23, 1943. Bakhuys Roozeboom, Idzerda, Marchant, and Schillmoller all received their wings that day. General Van Oyen expressed "the thanks

[44] Bakhuys Roozeboom, interview; Bakhuys Roozeboom, *Through My Viewfinder*, 21.

[45] "General Royce and General Van Oyen to Speak," *Jackson Army Air Base News*, February 13, 1943; "Dr. A. Loudon Will Speak at Graduation," *Jackson Army Air Base News*, March 13, 1943; "Dutch Fliers Get Wings," *Jackson Army Air Base News*, March 20, 1943; and "Dutch Cadets Get 4,500 Mile Test Hop across U.S.," *Jackson Army Air Base News*, March 27, 1943.

General Van Oyen, Colonel Foster, and Prince Bernhard with Governor Paul B. Johnson Sr., 1942. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

of the Netherlanders who are completing their work here, and of the boys who have already gone over, for the welcome given them in Jackson by [its] citizens and for the splendid training given them at the local base."[46]

Prince Bernhard, consort of Crown Princess Juliana and commander of all Dutch forces from the government's headquarters in London, visited Jackson twice to inspect the facilities and review the cadets. Governor Paul B. Johnson Sr. and Mayor Walter Scott greeted the prince upon his first visit on July 24, 1942, but the governor was out of the state when Bernhard visited again in late October. The prince and his party were entertained at the governor's mansion by Mrs. Johnson and met with Lieutenant Governor Dennis Murphree at his office in the state capitol. When asked to sign the guest book, the prince replied, "I have no address." Murphree answered, "We of Mississippi hope and believe that in the not-too-distant future your home address will be restored."[47]

[46] "God's Blessing Asked as Dutch Boys Get Wings," *Jackson Daily News*, July 24, 1943.

[47] "Prince Bernhard to Visit Dutch at Jackson Air Base," *Clarion-Ledger*, July

In October 1943, Princess Juliana visited Jackson. Colonel Giebel introduced her to Mayor Scott and other dignitaries. She reviewed the flying school personnel at an event that "saw international relations between little Holland and the United States further cemented, as armed forces of each nation paid honor to the flag of the other." Then the princess traveled to Colonel Giebel's home in the city as "thousands of Jacksonians lined Capitol street [*sic*]." Juliana accepted bouquets from local schoolchildren and gave a brief address, saying, "It is a genuine privilege to be in Jackson and in your midst, and to profess profound gratitude for the very warm welcome the Air Base officers and men and the city of Jackson have accorded my people."[48]

After training 187 pilots, 263 air gunners, 104 bombardiers, 13 navigators, and various other personnel, the officials of the Royal Netherlands Military Flying School lowered the Dutch flag over Jackson on February 8, 1944. Unfortunately, in less than two years, twenty-seven Dutch and Indonesian airmen were killed in training accidents across Mississippi and other states.[49]

Bad weather was certainly responsible in some cases, but the details behind each crash were rarely reported to the local media, and the Dutch military conducted its own investigations. It did not help that the Dutch pilots were infamously fond of performing dangerous aerial stunts. A cavalier attitude simply was a part of the culture. In fact, two men were killed on two separate occasions in high-speed, single-car collisions late at night on Jackson's roadways. Veterans at the fortieth reunion held here in 1982 asked, "How many of us trespassed on the rules of the city and got away with a friendly warning from the policemen who got [us]

24, 1942; "Prince Bernhard Sees Brutality of Nazis … ," *Clarion-Ledger*, July 25, 1942; "Prince Bernhard of Netherlands to Visit Cadets," *Clarion-Ledger*, October 29, 1942; "Netherlands Prince Greeted upon Arrival at Air Base by Acting-Gov. Dennis Murphree," *Clarion-Ledger*, October 30, 1942; and Aubrey Ballard, "Prince Hears Acting Gov. Murphree Pledge … ," *Clarion-Ledger*, October 31, 1942.

[48] "Princess Juliana Reviews Dutch Troops in Colorful Military Show," *Jackson Daily News*, October 30, 1943; "Dutch Princess Voices New Unity for United Nations Victory Drive; Winds Up Colorful Visit to City," *Jackson Daily News*, October 31, 1943.

[49] Ward, Boer, and Casius, *The RNMFS*, 137–41; Jack Hancock, "Last Dutch Leave Here as Training Completed," *Jackson Daily News*, February 9, 1944; and associated death certificates, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Mississippi Department of Health, Series 2144, MDAH.

violating the law?"[50]

Dutch pilots liked to test their mettle by flying beneath the old Mississippi River Bridge at Vicksburg. Bakhuys Roozeboom said, "That was pretty well a daily sport, was to go under those bridges, and that was a lot of fun." He continued, "A lot of the people think that's pretty scary, but basically speaking, you could fly a big bomber through there. It had a lot of room, so I don't know. It was just fun." Schillmoller, a rare fighter pilot who valued his own safety, had a different view. The stunt "scared off most people but not Bakhuys [Roozeboom]. He had a lot of guts, that guy. And he just loved flying under the bridge. It didn't bother him. And we all admired him."[51]

The pilots also harassed local fisherman. Bakhuys Roozeboom wrote that they would "fly so low along the Mississippi River that you actually formed a wake with your slipstream. When we came roaring towards a small fishing vessel it usually scared the fisherman enough to cause him to panic and dive into the river."[52]

These were not the only dangerous stunts to attract the young cadets. Airmen were also known to dip their planes under telephone wires, buzz sunbathing girls at Livingston Park, and do low-level fly-bys of Capitol Street.[53]

Rudolf Idzerda wrote, "I think the explanation for this recklessness lies in the fact that in the Indies there was a 'macho' culture among schoolboys, who tried to outdo each other in activities like sports, camping, and hunting, the climate in the Indies of course also contributing. Possibly, be it subconsciously, the humiliating idea of being kicked out of one's country by the Japanese, had also something to do with it."[54]

Simple flying was dangerous enough. Winny Schalk from Batavia and Jean Andreas Butner from the Netherlands were the first cadets killed in a training accident. Their aircraft crashed at a municipal airport outside of Vicksburg on May 27, 1942. Witnesses reported that the trainer went into a tailspin at one thousand feet and plunged to the

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[50] "Dutch Officer Dies after Auto Wreck," *Clarion-Ledger*, October 18, 1943; "Lt. Von Rossum Killed in Auto Crash Here," *Clarion-Ledger*, August 31, 1942; and speech given at 1982 reunion.

[51] Bakhuys Roozeboom, interview; Schillmoller, interview.

[52] Bakhuys Roozeboom, *Through My Viewfinder*, 19.

[53] Bakhuys Roozeboom, interview; Rudolf J. Idzerda, interview by the authors (telephone), July 26, 2012, MDAH; and Helfrich, interview.

[54] Idzerda, *Adventures of a Flying Dutchman*, 53.

Willem Bakhuys Rooseboom with his P-40, "Mississippi Belle," in Merauke, New Guinea, 1944. Courtesy Willem Roozeboom.

ground. A tractor was required to pull the engine from the earth and recover the bodies. Schalk had just received his wings earlier that day.[55]

Another fatal crash occurred during night-flying exercises near Jackson on October 21, 1943. Jopie Peters-Jansen's husband, Gerrit Grijsen, left for the air base at seven o'clock and planned to return a few hours later. "At eleven o'clock, the bell was ringing, and two people stood in front of the house," she said. "They rang the bell and I said, 'Look it's not a time to visit. It's too late. What are you doing here?' But they didn't say anything, and then I felt that something was wrong." Grijsen's B-25 bomber had crashed near the Jackson Country Club, killing all three men on board.[56]

Grijsen had visited Princess Juliana in Canada shortly before his death, and the princess extended her condolences to his widow during her visit to Jackson. The two met at a dinner held in Juliana's honor.

[55] Winny Schalk, death certificate no. 8,438 and Jean Andreas Butner, death certificate no. 8,437 (1942), Series 2144, MDAH; "Dutch Airmen Die as Plane Takes Dive," *Clarion-Ledger*, May 28, 1942; and "Two Dutch Fliers Killed in Crash Here Yesterday," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, May 28, 1942.

[56] Peters-Jansen, interview; "2 Dutch Officers, U.S. Airman Killed on Routine Flight," *Clarion-Ledger*, October 22, 1943.

"She spoke to me and … the tears were running down her cheek," Peters-Jansen recalled. "She said, 'Just a few weeks ago your husband was at my home and I can't believe it, that this has happened … I'm so worried about my own husband because he is a pilot in the air force in England.'"[57]

The fallen were buried in Cedarlawn Cemetery on a plot ceded to the Dutch by the city of Jackson. "We all marched from the base to the cemetery behind the coffin [for every funeral]," P.W. Burgemeestre said. On January 16, 1943, General Van Oyen unveiled a monument designed by Jan Staal and paid for by the personnel. During her visit, Princess Juliana placed a wreath in front of the obelisk to honor her fallen countrymen.[58]

Ambassador Loudon later said, "The conveyance of part of the very soil of the municipality is a token of goodwill and friendliness which, when peace reigns again, will be understood by the people of the Netherlands as a symbol of the indestructible bonds which have united our two countries since the rise of the American Republic."[59]

The Dutch fliers carried this sentiment—and the love of Mississippi sweethearts—with them when they returned to war. Some joined the Allied forces in Europe, while others travelled to the Pacific. Initially, their destinations were chosen randomly. The men were lined up and "every second one had to step up and then they said, 'You are going to England, and you are going to Australia,'" Dick Schillmoller remembered. "And we surely didn't like that because we were usually standing next to a friend of ours. So we insisted that we choose on a voluntary basis." Understandably, those from the Indies wanted to fight the Japanese while men from the Netherlands wanted to face the Nazis. However, in general, the navy personnel transferred to Europe, and the army moved to Australia.[60]

In spring 1943, Jan Helfrich joined several other Jackson trainees in the British Fleet Air Arm. Before he left, Helfrich proposed to Marjorie Brooks, whom he had dated since Gerry van Schieveen's death, but

[57] Peters-Jansen, interview.

[58] Burgemeestre, interview; "Monument for Fallen Dutch Dedicated Here," *Jackson Army Air Base News*, January 16, 1943; Mary Staal, interview; and "Princess Juliana Reviews Troops in Colorful Military Show," *Jackson Daily News*, October 30, 1943.

[59] "Services Held Here for 2 Dutch Fliers," *Clarion-Ledger*, February 1, 1944.

[60] Schillmoller, interview; Idzerda, *Adventures of a Flying Dutchman*, 60.

Brooks felt they were too young to marry. She said, "We were better off waiting until after the war to get married … and I didn't want to quit going places for however long [it lasted]. But I never met anybody else like him. … He was a great guy, and he had a marvelous personality." They did not see each other again for nearly four years, but letters kept them close.[61]

Helfrich piloted American-made Hellcats aboard the aircraft carrier HMS *Emperor*. He and his countrymen hunted submarines in British waters until the Royal Navy tasked them against the German battleship, *Tirpitz*. Helfrich flew in a raid against it on July 17, 1944. Numerous attacks like his forced the Germans to perform constant repairs until the *Tirpitz* was finally sunk in November. Marjorie Brooks did not hear from Helfrich for nearly a month after his engine was damaged, and he was forced to crash-land his Hellcat on top of Mt. Olympus on October 17. Thankfully, he walked away from the wreck in good spirits and returned to his ship.[62]

Harry Bakker served in both theaters and was separated from his Mississippi bride for two years. First, he was shipped to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in the Indian Ocean to crew PBY Catalina flying boats. "We flew quite a bit there, mostly convoy duty and anti-submarine missions," Bakker wrote. During one trip, his plane crash-landed in the ocean and began taking on water. The eleven-man crew abandoned it for their emergency dinghy and floated for a whole day before drifting ashore near a coconut plantation. After their rescue, Bakker wrote, "All eleven of us were in good shape and ready to go again. Ain't war fun!"[63]

In fall 1944, Bakker's crew was transferred to England, where they retrained on B-25s and flew bombing missions over Europe. Once, Bakker's target was in the Netherlands, his own homeland. "It was not easy for us to go out and bomb the place where some of our families lived," he wrote, but they bombed "warehouses on the outskirts of The Hague, and I knew my family was all right." Later on, Bakker dropped food

[61] Helfrich, interview.

[62] Tony Drury, "A History of 800 Naval Air Squadron," Fly Navy, accessed October 16, 2012, http://www.royalnavyresearcharchive.org.uk/ESCORT/S800.htm; Lyons, *World War II: A Short History*, 225; Jan Helfrich, logbook, collection of Marjorie Helfrich, Bolton, MS; Marjorie Helfrich, interview by Amanda Russ [Lyons], Jackson, MS, September 30, 2008, notes in authors' possession; and Helfrich, interview (2012).

[63] Bakker, "Memoirs from World War II," 11–14.

instead of bombs over Holland.[64]

Most of the Dutch fliers in Jackson went to relieve and reinforce Netherlands East Indies squadrons fighting with the Royal Australian Air Force. One bomber and one fighter squadron were established. The 18th Squadron, flying B-25 bombers, was formed in April 1942. The first Jackson trainees arrived in the spring of 1943.[65]

That summer, Rene Wittert flew the first large group of B-25s across the Pacific. He lobbied for the Jackson students to ferry their own planes from the United States. At first, General Van Oyen balked, citing safety concerns. The general finally agreed, Wittert wrote, "but he made one condition in order to be completely sure of the correctness of his decision: I must first go alone … [and] if I were still of the same opinion that our pilots could fly over their own B-25s, then I would report that by telegraph to Van Oyen." Wittert was successful, and the student group completed the crossing in July. In October, instructor Jan Staal also transferred to Australia with another group of students.[66]

The 18th Squadron operated from Batchelor Field in northern Australia. "Contrary to the civilized homecoming in England," air gunner Otto Ward wrote, "our bases were just tents in the Australian bushes with snakes and scorpions, open toilets and showers, and we were living there as jungle natives." The squadron was assigned reconnaissance flights and bombing missions against Japanese ships, airfields, and other installations in the South Pacific. Wittert wrote that this "meant flights over a widespread ocean area, followed by an attack on a small, but well-fortified, Japanese target." Damaged planes faced a difficult return trip across hundreds of miles of shark-infested waters.[67]

The 120th Squadron, flying P-40 fighters, saw much less action. Jackson's pursuit pilots sailed for Australia in December 1943 to join the

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[64] Ibid., 14–16.

[65] Otto Ward, "Leven en Werken in Het 18 Squadron NEI," *De Stuurkolom*, 30th ed. (ML-KNIL Reunion Association, October 2012), 29, 31 (provided to the authors and translated by Martin Noordzij, assistant navy attaché, Netherlands Embassy, Washington, D.C.); Guus van Oorschot, email message to authors, May 3, 2013.

[66] Wittert, *Het Vergeten Squadron*, ch. 3; Ward, Boer, and Casius, *The RNMFS*, 132, 210, 279.

[67] Otto Ward, "18 Squadron N.E.I.A.F.," *Dispersals: 2nd Tactical Air Force Medium Bombers Association Newsletter* (May 2009), pp. 30–31, accessed May 31, 2013, www.bamf.be/Dispersals/Dispersals_May_09.pdf; Wittert, *Het Vergeten Squadron*, ch. 6.

newly-formed squadron. Unfortunately, the Americans were reluctant to deal with another ally—let alone one that spoke a different language—so the 120th was relegated to rearguard actions.[68]

Rudolf Idzerda, Willem Bakhuys Roozeboom, and Dick Schillmoller joined the squadron in Australia then transferred to Merauke, Papua New Guinea. "From Merauke we flew endless patrols and sank a few small Japanese ships," Bakhuys Roozeboom wrote. His plane was named "Mississippi Belle" for a Jackson girlfriend.[69]

Out of boredom, the men learned to use their P-40s as makeshift dive bombers, though the fighters lacked dive brakes. Idzerda wrote, "Our standard tactic was a dive-bomb attack from about 4000 meters with as a rule two 500-pounders carried under the wings, followed by a strafing run on the target with our six 50 cal. machine guns."[70]

In 1945, the squadron transferred to Biak on the northern coast of New Guinea. While there, Schillmoller bartered bottles of whiskey for American Jeeps. Before long, he said, "we had forty Jeeps, instead of two or three."[71]

All three men flew on a disastrous and ill-advised raid against a Japanese radio beacon hidden beneath a hundred feet of coral reef at Manokwari. Hit by anti-aircraft fire, Bakhuys Roozeboom crash-landed in the ocean. "The plane hit the water [and] bounced once," he wrote. Then it "dove under the surface of the sea." He scrambled into his dinghy to await rescue. Idzerda parachuted out of his damaged P-40 and sheltered with native Papuans (thankfully not members of a "headhunting" tribe) until his own rescue. Schillmoller's attack wing, which was set to execute a strafing run after dropping its bombs, waved off after Bakhuys Roozeboom's detachment was decimated.[72]

Air superiority was the key to victory in World War II. Though small in number, Dutch aviators helped the Allies master the skies. Whether flying carrier planes and flying boats like Helfrich and Bakker or long-range bombers like the men of the 18th Squadron (and to a lesser extent

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[68] Hurst, *The Fourth Ally*, 94; Ward, Boer, and Casius, *The RNMFS*, 279; Bakhuys Roozeboom, interview; and Schillmoller, interview.

[69] Bakhuys Roozeboom, *Through My Viewfinder*, 29; Bakhuys Roozeboom, interview.

[70] Idzerda, *Adventures of a Flying Dutchman*, 67.

[71] Schillmoller, interview.

[72] Bakhuys Roozeboom, *Through My Viewfinder*, 30, 40–43; Idzerda, *Adventures of a Flying Dutchman*, 72, 76–80; and Schillmoller, interview.

the 120th Squadron fighter pilots), they engaged the enemy on every front. The Dutch also provided vital operational support and reconnaissance flights to Allied forces. The flying school in Jackson had readied them for battle, and with their help, the Allies won the war.

Nazi Germany had surrendered on May 9, 1945, and the Japanese laid down arms on August 15, 1945. Idzerda said, "This unexpected end to the war was felt as an anti-climax by many of us [fighter pilots]. We could look back on a period in which boredom and frustration alternated with moments of fear during dangerous missions, and sorrow at the loss of comrades." But in Europe, Harry Bakker wrote, "All of us wanted to go home and see our families."[73]

Those sailors and airmen who had escaped the Germans and Japanese in the early years of the war were forced to leave their loved ones at the mercy of the occupiers. Reentering the fight to rescue their families and avenge the seizure of their homes was always at the forefront of the men's minds. Many had by now formed their own families, forever rooting the Dutch to Mississippi by marriage, but their southern brides joined them abroad.

After his daring escape from occupied Europe, Jan Veenstra's family remained in the Netherlands and only learned of his safe arrival in the U.S. after three long years. The Nazis briefly imprisoned Veenstra's father because they suspected he was Jewish, but the entire family managed to survive the war. In 1946, Veenstra, his Mississippi bride, Willowdeen Newell, and their young son moved to the Netherlands. Newell described the reunion at the dock. "All of a sudden, there's this older man with his arms around Johnnie [Veenstra's nickname], crying and holding him, and Johnnie was crying. Then there was his mother. Everybody was crying." Newell met the extended family at a party that evening. "I never had so many bouquets of tulips put in my arms in my life." The couple returned to Mississippi in December 1947.[74]

Harry Bakker had been separated from his family in the Netherlands for nine years. They were finally reunited in 1945. "Tears rolled freely and there were plenty of hugs; we could not let go," Bakker wrote. His Jackson bride, Gena Kate Brister, joined him in the Netherlands in

[73] Idzerda, *Adventures of a Flying Dutchman*, 82; Bakker, "Memoirs of World War II," 16.

[74] Veenstra, *The Escape*, 34; Broadaway, "After 'The Escape,'" 2–3; and Broadaway, interview.

Willowdeen and Jan Veenstra with their son in the Netherlands, 1946. Courtesy Jacob Veenstra.

1946, but in 1948, they also returned to Mississippi.[75]

Marjorie Brooks and Jan Helfrich confirmed their engagement through letters before she sailed for the Netherlands in 1946. "We landed in Rotterdam," she said. "The whole crowd of people [was] there, and I could see this big, tall guy in uniform … taller than everybody else." Helfrich had purchased a bouquet of roses the day before and asked the clerk to put them in water. "I took the paper off and all the leaves came flying out and they hit the ground. I guess the guy had forgotten to put them in water. … It was funny." Helfrich and Brooks wed on October 29, 1946, and they moved back to Mississippi in 1950.[76]

Dutch fliers returning to the Netherlands East Indies liberated their loved ones from Japanese internment camps. After the conquest of the Indies in 1942, Dutch men were almost immediately interned. Dutch women and children were later arrested and driven into camps

[75] Bakker, "Memoirs from World War II," 17–18.

[76] Marjorie Helfrich, interview by the authors, Bolton, MS, August 21, 2012, MDAH; Helfrich, interview (February 29, 2012); and wedding invitation, collection of Marjorie Helfrich, Bolton, MS.

where thousands died of malnutrition and lack of medical care.[77]

Bill Marchant and his Mississippi bride, Jacqueline Mullins, were stationed in Australia, awaiting news of his family in the Indies. Marchant's parents and brother had been imprisoned in separate camps. His father weighed only ninety pounds by the war's end. His mother had saved a blue bowl as a kind of talisman, believing that "as long as this bowl is unbroken … I will find my family." In 1946, they were all reunited in Australia and met Marchant's new wife. "I had to choose shoes for my mother-in-law I had never seen," Mullins said. "Bill sent clothes to his father which swallowed him because he was so thin."[78]

Jan Helfrich married Marjorie Brooks in the Netherlands, 1946. Courtesy Marjorie Helfrich.

Later Marchant went to Java, and his wife and newborn son followed. Jacqueline Marchant returned to Mississippi in 1947, but Bill Marchant first went to the Netherlands for his demobilization and immigrated in 1948.[79]

Jan Helfrich's parents miraculously escaped the camps in Java. When the Japanese occupiers took over an orphanage, throwing nearly four hundred children into the street, the Helfrichs took the orphans into

[77] Louis Pauselius, *The End of an Era* (n.p., n.d.), 37–39, in authors' possession; Leonie Lange Phefferkorn, interview by the authors, Jackson, MS, July 26, 2012, MDAH.

[78] Lucie Magee, "Blue Bowl, Dutch Fliers and Whispering Wind Spelled Happy Ending," unknown newspaper, 1950, quoted in A. M. ten Siethoff-Marchant, "Family Stories" (1991), pp. 91, 94–95, copy provided to authors by Edward Marchant, Jackson, MS.

[79] Ibid.; Marchant, interview.

their home. Though they had been scheduled for arrest, the Japanese decided to leave them alone. Some even helped to feed the children, but in the end, the Helfrichs sold nearly everything they owned to care for the city's orphans. When Jan Helfrich found his old home in September 1945, he barely recognized it and was forced to climb over a mountain of cots to reach his elated parents.[80]

Others were not so fortunate.

Mississippian Lois Lange's husband, Harry, learned from the Red Cross that both his parents had died in Japanese camps. "It was a bad, bad thing for him," Lange said. "He literally couldn't get over it." P.W. Burgemeestre received the same news. "Many of them didn't make it, like my father and mother. They both died," he said. "I was in many of the camps after the war, where I looked for them. … In those days, I had a real tough time for a long time looking for them." After confirming their deaths, Burgemeestre settled in Jackson with his Mississippi bride.[81]

Dick Schillmoller's father served with the military police in Java and waged a guerilla war against the Japanese before his internment. "I went to Bandung to get my father," Schillmoller said. "He was surprised … to see me turn up suddenly." He had survived, but Schillmoller's mother had not. "My father hadn't known that she had died. So that's pretty tough, but I was the driving force to get the family back on their feet."[82]

The Dutch fought for five years to reclaim their home and colonies, but just two days after the Japanese surrender, nationalist leader Sukarno declared Indonesian independence. Soon an all-out revolt raged, and British troops arrived to keep the peace. While Sukarno was willing to talk, many angry revolutionaries were simply out for revenge and took the opportunity to indiscriminately massacre European and Chinese civilians.[83]

One brutal attack hit home in Mississippi. *Jackson Daily News* reporter Bette Barber covered the Dutch fliers during their time in Jackson. Her photographs from the period bring the Dutch flying school and its cadets to life. Barber met army meteorologist Siem van der Molen,

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[80] Helfrich, interview (February 29, 2012).

[81] Lois Lange, interview by the authors (telephone), March 13, 2012, transcript in authors' possession; Burgemeestre, interview. P. W. Burgemeestre of Jackson died in 1994 and is buried at Cedarlawn Cemetery (see obituary in the *Northside Sun*, June 9, 1994).

[82] Schillmoller, interview.

[83] Hurst, *The Fourth Ally*, 132–33.

"an accomplished violinist, [who] made many friends with thousands of Jacksonians. … He played at least once in every church in Jackson, at war bond and other wartime rallies and in concerts of both military and civilian musicians."[84]

Barber and Van der Molen married on June 19, 1944, and in August, he went to Australia. Barber followed. Van der Molen later transferred to the Indies and was killed on October 14, 1945. Former Royal Netherlands Military Flying School trainee Henri Moquette described the circumstances in a letter to Halla Mae Pattison, a state employee in Jackson. "You have heard probably of the sad death of Siem vander [*sic*] Molen. He was on his way with a party of Dutchmen by car from Batavia to Bandoeng and was attacked by a mob of natives. Poor Bette. I am trying to get her a passage to the States as soon as possible. At the moment she still is in Brisbane." The *Jackson Daily News* reported Van der Molen's death on its front page. Barber eventually returned to the United States.[85]

In summer 1945, Mississippi-native Lois Lange followed her Dutch husband, Harry, to Australia. The two moved on to Java in December 1946. Lois and other wives were camped in an old prison in Surabaya. Their drinking water was black, full of chemicals that the British poured in it to combat the poisons Japanese soldiers left behind. Their only food was hard, inedible bread delivered every afternoon.[86]

Harry Lange and his fellow Dutchmen remained aboard their ship at the docks in Surabaya, preparing to sail for Batavia to offer relief and keep the peace. Desperate for food, Lois Lange and four friends decided to risk the dirt road to the docks. The young mother left her oldest son in the camp. The four women each took turns carrying Lange's baby, choking on the dust that rose up from the narrow road and listening as

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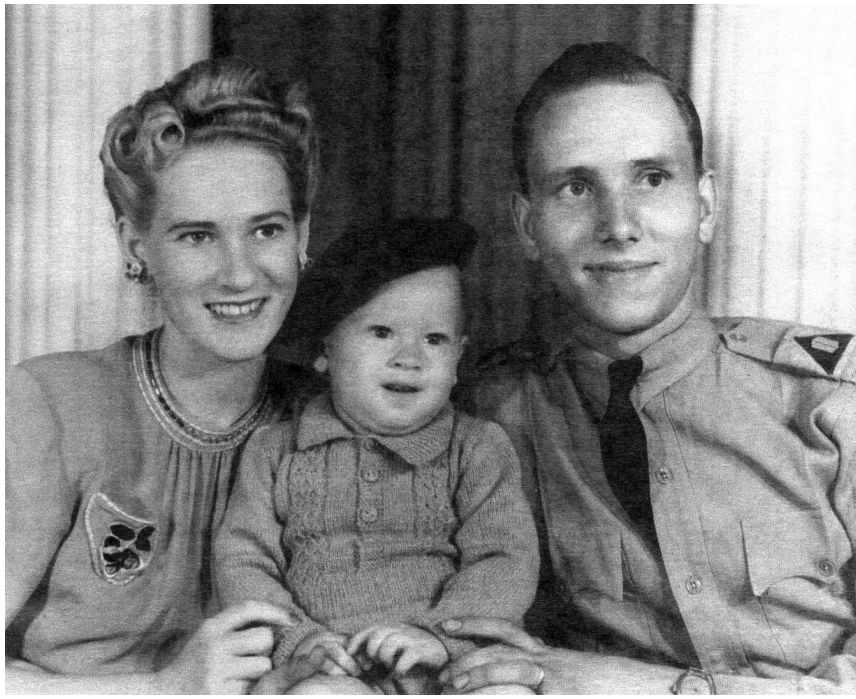
[84] "Van Der Molen, Widely Known Here Killed in Java," *Jackson Daily News*, October 23, 1945. Barber's photographs and negatives are housed at MDAH in the Bette E. Barber Photograph Collection, Z/0839.001/S.

[85] "Miss Bette Barber Is United in Marriage to Netherlands Officer, Wedding in Orleans," *Vicksburg Post-Herald*, July 23, 1944; Ward, Boer, and Casius, *The RNMFS*, 192; "Halla Mae Pattison Turner" subject file, MDAH; Lt. Col. Henri Moquette to Mrs. Halla May Pattison, November 8, 1945, in "Dutch in Jackson" subject file, MDAH; and "Van der Molen Killed in Java."

[86] Lois Lange, interview by the authors (telephone), March 7, 2012, transcript in authors's possession; Lange, interview (March 13, 2012); and Lois Lange, interview by the authors, Navarre, FL, September 21, 2012, MDAH.



Lois and Harry Lange with their son in Australia after the war. Courtesy Lois Lange.

gunshots rang out in the distance.[87]

The women shared a tearful reunion with their husbands. The men brought them aboard, and the ship's cook made them a hearty breakfast. Then they filled two sacks full of everything they could carry. "They packed us up with sugar, with canned milk, with jams, with everything that every one of us could carry," Lange said. "I knew we couldn't take any eggs because we were afraid we'd break those … [Finally, I said,] we've got to leave. One of us has to carry the baby!"[88]

The women started back. Miles into the trip to camp, Lange dropped her sack and sat on the ground. "I got so tired and the sun was hot. … I was crying. I said, 'Oh God, how did I get in this kind of mess?' … I sat there for a minute and I thought, 'What am I doing? There's people [who have been] murdered and killed and suffered.'. . . We could hear the guns. We could hear the Indonesians killing the Dutch people everywhere. … And here I am crying because I'm having to walk in a little hot sun

[87] Lange, interview (March 7, 2012).
[88] Ibid.; Lange, interview (September 21, 2012).

and in a dirty, dusty road." Lange picked herself up off the ground and rushed to catch her friends. She apologized for despairing and promised never to think like that again. The Langes eventually rented a house with Harry Lange's sister and lived in Indonesia for two years before returning to Mississippi.[89]

The Netherlands finally recognized Indonesian independence in 1949. Many Dutch citizens left the country because of continued violence, unrest, and the eventual rise of communism. The colonists no longer had a colony. Rudolf Idzerda wrote, "It gradually became clear to me that this country, where I was born, and where I had had such a wonderful childhood, was in fact not my country any more [*sic*]."[90]

Most Mississippi war brides joined their Dutch husbands in far-flung corners of the earth. After witnessing the horrors of Japanese internment camps in Java or wading through Holland's bombed-out rubble, many of the pilots and their families returned to the United States. Some made their way back to Jackson, and a few even trained new European pilots at Mississippi air bases.[91]

Those who returned added to the state's rich cultural diversity. Relationships forged during the war linked Mississippi families with relatives in the Netherlands and Indonesia. Many children and grandchildren of wartime marriages still reside in Mississippi today, providing a living testament to the lasting impact of the flying school. Other international connections have also endured. Even those who did not marry Mississippians returned for visits and reunions.

In recent years, several Dutch veterans have chosen Cedarlawn Cemetery as their final resting place. They were buried with comrades and friends in Dutch soil in the heart of Mississippi. Seventy years after its first burial, the plot is still a lasting legacy of the Dutch in Jackson.

The Dutch fliers also graced Mississippians with a unique, international perspective. To a man, they loved the United States and never took it for granted. Their struggle against tyranny abroad made American freedoms seem especially precious.

Though the flying school's race-based caste system proves that the

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[89] Ibid.; fare receipt, "Singapore to Houston on the SS *Doctor Lykes*," September 3, 1948, copy provided to authors by Lois Lange, Navarre, FL. Harry Lange of Florida died in 2007 and is buried at Cedarlawn Cemetery.

[90] Hurst, *The Fourth Ally*, 166; Phefferkorn, interview; Schillmoller, interview; and Idzerda, *Adventures of a Flying Dutchman*, 91.

[91] Helfrich, interview (February 29, 2012).

practices of our allies are as imperfect as our own, the Dutch dreamed of respect and equality for all. "When I talked to my dad," said Jacob Veenstra, son of Jan Veenstra, he believed "you should respect all people, no matter color, race, origin, [or] beliefs." Amy Pleasant, daughter of Harry and Gena Kate Bakker, said, "We definitely had a different outlook about the world because we had relatives living across the Atlantic." Andrea Perkins, their other child, added, "Daddy, he was not a southerner. … He had seen different races of people and been in different areas." Pleasant answered, "I think they were more accepting of people that were different because our family was quite different."[92]

Difficult experiences during the war refined their character. Jo Veenstra described her father-in-law, Jan Veenstra, as "head-and-shoulders above most of us in his stature, in his forgiveness, and his love of living and his joy for living." Edward Marchant, son of Bill and Jacqueline Marchant, said, "My father had more integrity than anybody I ever met." The Dutch fliers showed that "the world can come together," he said. "It was a different, dangerous world back then … [but] they persevered."[93]

The bonds forged in Jackson stayed strong. Jan Veenstra and Willowdeen Newell later divorced, but years later, they would meet again at a reunion for cadets and their families. Newell said, "He was sitting in the back seat [of the car], and I was sitting up front. He leaned over, put his arms around me and hugged me and whispered in my ear, 'I'll always love you.' And he gave me a kiss. That was my last time to see him."[94]

"I still remember with pleasure the very pleasant attitude of the Mississippi people," said Rudolf Idzerda, who now lives in France. "They were very hospitable, and of course, our English was pretty poor in those days, but they were just very hospitable and pleasant." Willem Bakhuys Roozeboom of Canada put it even more plainly, saying, "Thank you, Mississippi. Thank you, Jackson."[95]

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[92] Jacob and Jo Veenstra, interview by the authors, Jackson, MS, March 6, 2012, MDAH; Andrea Perkins and Amy Pleasant, interview by the authors, Jackson, MS, June 1, 2012, MDAH. Andries "Harry" Bakker of Clinton died in 2012.

[93] Veenstra, interview; Marchant, interview. Guillaume "Bill" Marchant of Madison died in 2005, and Jacqueline Marchant died in 2009.

[94] Broadaway, interview; Veenstra, interview. Jan Veenstra of California died in 2010, and Willowdeen Veenstra Broadaway of Jackson died on March 11, 2013.

[95] Idzerda, interview; Bakhuys Roozeboom, interview.