



PROJECT MUSE®

World War II

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1940 - 1945

World War II

Occupation and liberation

In 1933 Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany. He was the leader of the National Socialist German Workers Party, the NSDAP, known in English as the Nazi Party which promoted anti-Semitism. The party profited from the discontent felt by many Germans about the humiliating way in which Germany had been treated after World War I. Hitler intended to make Germany the most powerful country in Europe. He first directed attacks on Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland. Subsequently he planned to neutralise Germany's most stringent opponent in Western Europe: France. Both the Netherlands and Belgium were to be occupied in Hitler's invasion of France.

On the morning of Friday, 10 May 1940, many Dutch citizens were awoken by the droning of aircraft, exploding bombs and the rattling of tanks. German soldiers had crossed the border. The war had started. The Dutch army was far too weak to stand

up to the force of the German assault. Once the Germans had bombed the centre of Rotterdam into the ground and were threatening to treat other cities in the same way, the Dutch military command decided to surrender. The government and the queen had already fled to England.

Initially, the occupation did not seem too bad, but it quickly became clear what occupation really meant. Dutch men were forced to go and work in German factories. People were also taken away to prisons and concentration camps without any form of due process. The Jews in particular were persecuted. The occupying Germans transported over 100,000 Jewish men, women and children in freight trains from the Netherlands to concentration camps where most of them were put to death.

The Germans were assisted by members of the Dutch National Socialist Movement (NSB), who had a similar ideology, and by hangers-on and profiteers. On the other

side was the resistance movement, which gained a lot of support towards the end of the war in particular. The great majority of the Dutch population was anti-German but passive.

In the autumn of 1944, the south of the country was liberated by allied troops. The area above the great rivers, however (particularly the towns in the western provinces), had to endure the “winter of

starvation” before being liberated in their turn. An extreme food shortage weakened the population and tens of thousands died. In May 1945 the German commander signed the surrender and the whole of the Netherlands was liberated. At that time, the Dutch East Indies was still in the hands of the Japanese. Japan surrendered on 15 August 1945.

Sub-topics

Primary education sector

The German invasion of the Netherlands and the bombing of Rotterdam

Stories of the Resistance: the attack in Leeuwarden, Putten, Hannie Schaft, *Engelandvaarders* [the England-bound]

The NSB [National Socialist Movement]

The *Hongerwinter* [winter of starvation]

The Battle of Arnhem, D-day and liberation in May 1945

Secondary education sector

Types of collaboration, acceptance and resistance of the Dutch people

The Dutch policy of neutrality in the 1930s in the face of the German threat

The bombing of Rotterdam compared to other bombing campaigns (Warsaw, Coventry, Dresden)

Collaboration, acceptance and resistance of the Dutch people

World War II in Dutch literature (poetry and prose)

Past and Present

Why is World War II still commemorated on 4 and 5 May each year?

Monuments commemorating World War II (in almost every Dutch town)

In the Treasure Chest

Ration card

Identity card

DVD *Kind in de oorlog*, released by the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation

References

Places to Go

National War and Resistance Museum

Amsterdam Resistance Museum

Military cemeteries

Books for young people

Eric Heuvel, *De ontdekking* (Amsterdam 2003); cartoon that provides insight into many of the dilemmas the Dutch population was faced with during the war
Zwarte confetti, foto's, verhalen, gedichten en tekeningen over de oorlog (10+)

Paul Biegel, *De karabijn* (8+)

André Boesberg, *Zwarte stad* (Russia, 1942) (12+)

Herman van Campenhout, *Pikadon* (Hiroshima) (12+)

Mirjam Elias, *Het verlaten hotel*

Reg Grant, *De Tweede Wereldoorlog in Europa* (12+ info)

Dennis Hamley, *De Tweede Wereldoorlog* (12+ info)

Evert Hartman, *Oorlog zonder vrienden* (12+)

Els Pelgrom, *Kinderen van het Achtste Woud* (12+)

Aline Sax, *Mist over het strand* (12+)

Jan Terlouw, *Oorlogswinter* (12+)

Anke de Vries, *Belldonne kamer 16* (France) (12+)

Anna and Wout Woltz, *Post uit de oorlog*, (Amsterdam) (12+)

Background literature

L. de Jong, *De bezetting na vijftig jaar*. (3 volumes), The Hague 1990

Chris van der Heijden, *Grijs verleden: Nederland en de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Amsterdam/Antwerp 2001

David Barnouw, *De hongerwinter*. (Verloren Verleden 6), Hilversum 1999

Websites

www.spion.nl, a cooperation project running since 1999 between the National 4 & 5 May Committee and various war and resistance museums, memorial centres and producers of educational material in the Netherlands