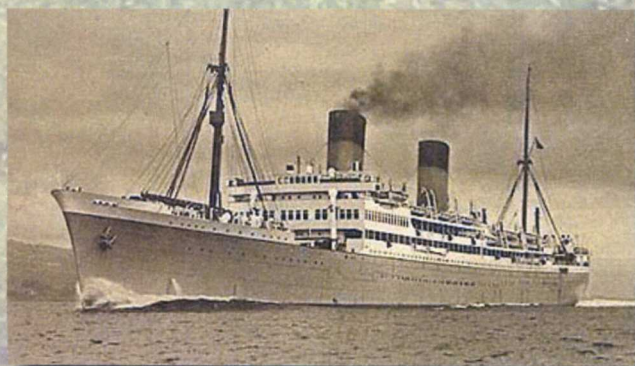




# *The 'Casino Boys'*

Dutch Air Force volunteers in Australia 1945 - 1946





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Dutch Air Force volunteers in Australia 1945-1946

*Karla Weller (Ed.)*





The cover was conceived by Kees van Grinsven.

On the front he wanted to express what their time in the Air Force and especially in Casino meant to the boys whose stories are told in this book.

The plane, of course, represents the dream that for most of them did not come true: being actively involved in flying.

The Dutch flag and sleeve emblem display their origin and loyalty at the time.

The *Arundel Castle* is one of the ships that took the boys on their "adventure" and brought them safely back home again.

The selection of camp photos shows training, watching, guarding, as well as their camaraderie.

And of course the background is the beautiful Australian landscape in which the stories took place.



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## Introduction

Welcome to the result of this past year's group effort to get a personal story about 'Casino' out on paper.

The idea for this book formed in my head over years of listening to stories about their life as *war volunteer*, mainly in Casino NSW, by the attendees of our reunions. At times my fingers itched to put 'pen to paper' – or rather fingers to keyboard, but other things happening in my life made me put off doing this.

Finally, during last year's (2006) reunion the penny dropped: if I don't do something now, it REALLY is too late. Yes, it is rather late already, as unfortunately our group of valiant warriors has dwindled and the yearly reunion, started in 1982, is now a cosy get-together of people who have come to know each other very well – almost have become family.

So I had a chat with some people present and on return to home base Sydney a 'conference' with my two fellow-committee members and we decided: yes, give it a go.

I sent a letter explaining my ideas to all 'ex-LSKers' who had been in Casino in 1945/6 and whose addresses (both in Australia and in Europe) I was able to obtain with lots of help from all who became eventually involved.

And after biting my nails for a while, responses started trickling in.

And what responses they were!

During March and April we received letters, emails and faxes and found that by May we had the full story from enlisting in the air force in Eindhoven to demobbing in Holland or Australia.

As dates and numbers are difficult to remember after such a long time (though some kept meticulous records during those years) I felt I had to do some further research.

I contacted people at the '*Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire History*' who were very helpful (Kauffman, van Vliet) and sent me some information, but most of my information came from or via the Internet.

As a result I was able to read several books discussing the period of interest (see bibliography) and together with the personal stories I obtained a good picture of these important years, in which a group of boys grew up and saw something of the rest of the world.

I was also able to obtain, with the help of everybody involved, photos and documents, some of which I have been able to insert in the story – unfortunately the number had to be limited because of the planned size of this book.

I wish to thank the other committee members: Kees van Grinsven and Cor Koedam, who became **very much** –actively – involved in the development of this work from the beginning to the end.

Also my family, without whose active interest I would have been unable to take on this project and complete it. Especially my husband Han(s), who translated those stories that were written in Dutch, did most of the proofreading and was my sounding board throughout. And of course my son Geoff, my computer guru – I would have been lost without him.



But most of all I thank all those who sent in their stories, as well as information, documents and photos and in general showed a keen interest in this project. It is no mean feat to go back some 60 years and after digging up the memories (sometimes literally), put them all in the computer, on paper and/or in the mail.

**The stories appear as a separate chapter at the end of this book and are its most important section**

**Notes:**

- Throughout the book **The Netherlands** has been called **Holland**, as that is the name we use when we speak about our country of birth.
- **Netherlands East Indies** (often referred to as **NEI**) eventually became **Indonesia** in our story and its people therefore **Indonesians** – a term better known now than the clumsy **'Indiërs'** of times past.
- The term **'LSK'** is frequently used and stands for **'LuchtStrijdKrachten'** which simply means: *air force*.
- The term **'KNIL'** stands for **'Koninklijk Nederlands-Indisch Leger'** which means *Royal Dutch-Indies Army*.

**Karla Weller.**

## **Chapter One: Enlistment**

It is spring 1945 in Eindhoven.

This town in the South of the Netherlands has been free from German occupation since the 18<sup>th</sup> September 1944 and is slowly getting back to some form of normality.

It is not the form of normality that was known before the occupation in May 1940, but the sense of freedom makes up for the lack of missing those things that are still not freely available, such as public transport, food and clothing – food and clothing are still only available on coupons and will remain so for several years to come.

Contact with the rest of the country – the area north of the big rivers that virtually divide Holland into two sections – is almost impossible and any news that crosses that line is often based on rumour or half truths.

The people in 'the South' who have relatives and friends in 'the North' have generally no idea how those people are faring. The reality is that large numbers of people in the North and especially the Northwest (now called the 'Randstad' and containing the four largest cities in Holland) are starving and many who live in the cities do not survive this period.

Their liberation does not take place until the 5<sup>th</sup> May 1945.

The people in Eindhoven meanwhile are enjoying their freedom – an exhilarating feeling which especially infects the young people.

The presence of the military is prominent – the troops are American and British and the 'Nederlandse Strijdkrachten' (Dutch defence forces) returning from England, where they had joined the Allied forces and have been preparing to return 'home' as soon as possible.

These troops bring a bit of life and entertainment in the town that has been missing for a long time.

Many schools have been claimed for use by the military and as a result many young people live a life in limbo. The weather during this period is nice Dutch spring weather; the atmosphere one of relief, promise and expectation.

In short, a situation in which young men are keen to have a bit of adventure and so react positively when they learn that the Dutch defence forces are looking for volunteers to join their air force.

For many their education has been shot to pieces by the war anyway and their future is not all that certain, despite the hopeful feeling in the air.

The reason for the search for volunteers is the need to assemble a largish group of air and ground crew to help in the liberation of the Netherlands East Indies (NEI, now Indonesia) and bring some order in the situation there, once this goal has been met.

At the end of 1943 a 'Stafcommissie Luchtstrijdkrachten' (Air force Committee) is formed in England, with the aim of putting together an air force of some 13,000 men – 2,500 aircrew and 10,500 ground crew – for that purpose.

In 1944 the 'Directoraat der Nederlandse Luchtstrijdkrachten' is established, which is given the job to recruit and train the air force personnel.

And a deal is struck with both RAF and RAAF to train both air- and ground crew.

After Eindhoven is liberated in September 1944, it is decided to establish a recruiting depot there, with agencies elsewhere in the liberated area of Holland and the aim is to recruit at least 1500 men in the South of Holland alone.



The depot is housed in two commercial buildings, situated in the Rechtestraat, previously occupied by *Van Hout Ververgaard* and *Witteveen* (stores selling clothing and Manchester), and on the 6<sup>th</sup> February 1945 the depot is officially opened.



De Rechtestraat, Eindhoven

Recruitment posters are hung at various locations in the southern provinces for all to see, radio and newspapers – such as they are at that period of time – spread the news as does ‘word of mouth’.

Although undoubtedly many of the young men who enlisted just looked for some adventure, many had already taken part in the war with the underground resistance movement and were keen to help finish the war, both in Holland and in the Indies.

Others were just relieved to get out of a country that had been a prison to them, as from age 16 they had had to hide from the Germans, who were continuously looking for civilian workers to replace their own men who were at the various war fronts.

The recruiting *procedure* has been described in various publications, so we are interested here to find out how the experience affected the boys who tried to join the Dutch air force. To this end we let some of them tell part of their experiences.

This will also give you some idea of the type of stories you can look forward to in the final chapter if this book.

Koos Dalmayer: *‘I lived in Waalwijk at the time and learned by word of mouth of the search for volunteers for the Dutch air force. We were liberated in October 1944 and in December we heard of a recruiting centre that would be opened in Waalwijk. ... I was called up to go to Eindhoven on 20.3.1945 and we went there by army truck. We had 10 days in Eindhoven for a medical, aptitude tests and interviews with Dutch air force officers about our life. After being accepted we received our English uniform and were put in ‘Pool Flight’ to do all kinds of little jobs and learn some discipline.*

*I enlisted in Eindhoven in the building where Van Hout-Ververgaard used to be housed’ tells Piet van Vegchel. I was medically checked in the St. Joseph Hospital and otherwise tested for the position of pilot or observer, because I had been educated at the Sint Joris College. ... At first I failed the test, because I could not keep my balance. One had to sit in a chair that was spun around very fast and then had to get up and walk a straight white line.*

*I asked whether I could do this in my socks instead of my shoes and this was allowed.*

*The reason for this? I had shoes with rags instead of proper soles, because who still had real soles under his shoes at this stage after the war!’*

Han Weller worked as an ‘ordonnance’ (messenger) for the military after the liberation of Eindhoven and that way found out about the possibility of volunteering as air crew. All ‘courier work’ was done on foot, for few people still had a bicycle with proper tyres.



*'I remember many military settlements in and around the city' he says, 'a tank repair depot in Gestel, where a big tent was erected as a workshop – I 'ran' messages between the various military depots and this way I learned that the Dutch military were looking for volunteers to join their Air force, destined to liberate 'Nederlands Oost Indië', which was still occupied by the Japanese, as part of the war in the Pacific.*

*The intake depot was in the Rechtestraat in the building where Van Hout Ververgaard used to be. I remember an interview I had about my knowledge of English which, despite having been taught the language at school and thinking that I would be OK, proved to be totally insufficient. I was given an English newspaper article to read and translate and found I didn't have a clue what it was all about. The response: 'in that case you'd better go to Australia instead of England for training'.*

*Kees van Grinsven lived in 's Hertogenbosch at the time and heard about the call for volunteers from friends. 'I was interviewed locally by three officers who told me at the conclusion of the interview that I had been selected for training with the air force as air crew.*

*My biggest problem was to get my father's permission to join , which he reluctantly gave and I reported to Eindhoven on 31 March 1945, when I had just turned 19.'*

*Jan Muys also had problems with obtaining permission and was so keen to join that he forged his mother's signature – he volunteered at Asten and, like the others, finished up in Eindhoven for final selection and official enlistment.*



**Dutch sleeve emblem**

*Ton Minderhout, who came from Zeeland (Middelburg), saw the recruitment posters and after getting reluctant permission from his parents left for Eindhoven with a group of other volunteers on the 12<sup>th</sup> March 1945. They travelled in army trucks and underwent the required medicals and tests and after being accepted received their RAF uniforms, with a patch reading 'Nederland' on their sleeve.*

*Finally Henk van Akkeren took a philosophical view and asked: 'What makes one enlist as a war volunteer when finally having been liberated after four and a half years living with the violence of war, to go to the other side of the world to liberate the Dutch East Indies? One could enlist with the Dutch Air force – the adventure was offered to you on a plate.*

*I would, considering my age, have had to go into the army as a conscript anyway, so why not go as a volunteer and choose the unit where I would serve. So I went to the indicated office and was registered to serve with the 'Luchtstrijdkrachten' to be trained as ground crew /flight engineer because of my training.*

*On the 1<sup>st</sup>. of May we left Vlissingen by boat across the flooded island of Walcheren and on to Middelburg and from there we left in a three ton truck to Eindhoven.*

*In Eindhoven we were housed in the recruitment building in the Rechtestraat. And here we had a medical and were also interrogated to find out whether one had been 'correct' during the occupation and not involved with the occupiers, as some were.'*

*[van Akkeren – biography]*

*And so they all enlisted for their own reasons and with their own particular hopes and plans and we will follow them along the way until they return to home base.*



## Chapter Two: Wolverhampton

In January 1945 the aim had been to recruit 1500 men from the 'South' – in actual fact the total number that was recruited in this area was 1559.

The group that left Eindhoven in March consisted of 441 flight crew, 1006 ground crew and 112 men added to other sections (Ward).

Most of the applicants had wanted to become aircrew as can be expected, however, those who were unable to join as aircrew were content to join in whatever position they were offered or at least they didn't show their disappointment – they still remained keen to go overseas to help finish the war in the Pacific and liberate the Netherlands East Indies (NEI).

They left in the uniform of the RAF.

They went to England via Belgium, and their destination in England was Wrottesley Park Camp near Wolverhampton in the English Midlands.

The trip to the Belgian coast was made in army trucks.

Only one member of the group mentions **flying** to England: Jan Muys says: *'I have no idea why I was chosen to go by air, whilst most of the others seem to have gone by road. We were in a small group and flew in an unarmed Dakota, over Belgium and northern France to London.'*

Piet van Vegchel went by road and describes his trip to England: *'In an open truck along bomb damaged roads to the Belgian coast.*

*In a classy hotel in Oostende we were received with nice, yellow slices of cake – one slice each.*

*When we said that we had not seen real cake for four years, we were allowed to eat as much as we wanted.*

*We later sailed to London on the "SS. Duke of York".'*

The move was made over several days, seeing the size of the contingent to be transferred to England and the men went to either Blankenberge or Oostende, from where they sailed on various ships to England and docked at Tilbury.

One group that went to Blankenberge stayed in a large hotel, which was clearly used as troop accommodation before and was well suited to house them for the three nights they had to wait there: Koos Dalmayer: *'Our group left 31/3/45 to Blankenberge, Belgium and had to wait till 3/4/45 before we could sail to England with the boat called Ulster Monarch to Tilbury England. Waiting time was because there were too many "U" boats in the area. We arrived next day 4/4 (the trip was made during the night) in Tilbury.'* From there they went by train to London and on to Wolverhampton. Another group did sail during the day and arrived at Tilbury by 6 pm; they also went by train to London, but went no further, as it was too late to carry on to Wolverhampton. At the station there was transport to take them to the RAF hotel where they stayed the night. And during that night the air raid alarm sounded twice, most likely for an attack by V-1 and V-2 rockets, but since the boys were rather blasé about air raids by now, some slept right through it or just stayed in their comfortable, warm bed instead of going to the air raid shelter.

One of them, Piet van Vegchel, shared with us his philosophy of the situation: *'I decided to have a bath – never had an opportunity to do that properly during the war, because I had been in hiding from the Germans.*

*I was just having a lovely soak when the air raid alarm sounded.*



*I just stayed in the tub, thinking that, if the hotel was hit I would at least be clean going to heaven.'*

The next day this group also went by train to Wolverhampton and arriving at the station they saw to their amazement that the bus waiting to take them to the camp was a Dutch bus complete with the Dutch lion painted on it!

Arriving at the camp they found that the entrance was guarded by a Dutch guard and the first street they saw was called: 'Koningin Wilhelmina straat'. As a finishing touch, outside one of the buildings was the very Dutch sign: 'voeten vegen s.v.p.' [please wipe your feet].

It turned out that Wrottesley Park Camp was a Dutch camp and that it was here that the well known 'Princess Irene Brigade' was formed and trained.

It was now a Dutch transit camp, housing the KNIL, of which the boys were part (detachment ML-KNIL), as well as the 'Vrouwelijk Hulpcorps' (Women's Auxiliary). The camp was fairly large, though not fully occupied at the time.

Accommodation was in barracks, which were arranged along several 'streets'.

There were about 30 people housed in each barrack, which contained stretcher beds with straw mattresses and blankets but no sheets – another novelty. On the whole this accommodation was found rather comfortable after having got used to it.



Wolverhampton, stretchers in tents

A plus was that the food was excellent as van Grinsven reports: *'I remember the mess hall and the trays of bacon, eggs and the sort and quantity of food we hadn't seen or tasted for years.'*

The other buildings included. offices, two canteens, a dining hall, hospital, post office and bookshop.

Entertainment was available in a large movie theatre, where films were shown three times per week and dances were also organised regularly, to which girlfriends were welcome.

Though the boys were not allowed to leave the camp for the first 10 days, after that they were allowed to visit the town or go sightseeing in the countryside or visit other cities.

During their relatively short stay, two of the boys (Koedam and Weller) managed to get away for a weekend trip to Coventry, where they stayed in a hotel – another new experience in a new country. They were shown around the town by a girl one of the boys had known in Eindhoven and when at the end of the day, they took her to the hotel (and up to their room) to 'spruce' themselves up and in the hope of being able to get something to eat, they were quickly put in their place by the manageress.

She came up to their room and told them sternly not to take girls up to their room – *'we felt rather offended'* writes Koedam.

To make matters worse there was no food available, so they left to spend the rest of the evening elsewhere.

Military training was also commenced in this camp, albeit fairly rudimentary.



It consisted mainly of 'exercitie' (marching drill), though some were taught Morse code and other useful skills. Most of all they learned how to look after themselves in a practical way and one of the things they learned was how to make their own bed in the particular 'model' way required in the forces.

Most of the new recruits were pretty 'raw' with no military training or knowledge whatsoever. They were young, still in or barely out of their teens and trying to find the 'fun' side of their experience, not being too worried about what they were or were not learning at the time. Their reports on the camp therefore deal more with the pleasant time they had there than with the 'real' work they had to do – if any.

One of the first things that was taken care of was giving the boys the required vaccinations and as a result many of them did not really feel up to scratch when they were ordered to run round the camp as part of their training. But the drill sergeant accepted no excuses and run they must: good for the circulation and a way to get over the sickness as quickly as possible.

Did anybody manage to escape these orders and avoid the running? Did anybody get really ill? – One of the vaccinations was against smallpox, a vaccine that is known to sometimes cause problems, especially for adults.

In April the time had come to make ready for Australia and to change from the grey RAF uniform into the blue RAAF one. To obtain these uniforms the group travelled to London on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April and were lodged in a hotel for the night, after which they returned to Wolverhampton, ready to go to Australia.

On May 5<sup>th</sup>, when Holland was liberated there were moderate celebrations '*we had to stay in camp and there were some celebrations in the camp with big bottles of beer*' (van Grinsven).

Some of the boys were lucky to have had at least this celebration as, when on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May the Germans surrendered and WWII officially came to an end, the first group to leave for Australia was in the process of boarding the *Rangitata* at Liverpool, ready to leave for Australia and another bottle of beer was their only 'celebration' after being told the news. They missed out on any of the festivities that took place all over the country and so also in Wolverhampton – as Ton Minderhout tells it: '*we celebrated VE day in Wolverhampton with parades, a big party in the Civic Hall with plenty of nice girls.*'

The second group of boys left Liverpool on 29<sup>th</sup> May on board the *Arundel Castle* while the third group sailed from Glasgow on the 18<sup>th</sup> June 1945 on the *Orontes*.

And so the long trip to Australia and into active service had begun.

The stay in the camp had been relatively short, especially for the first group to leave; it had been the boys' first – positive – experience of life in the forces and they were looking forward to the next episode.

They were all keen to go and liberate the rest of the world, help end the war in the Pacific, liberate NEI and set things right again in that country.

But most of all: have the opportunity to get their air force training.

**Little did they know that not much would come of that in the end.**



## **Chapter Three: To the Other side of the World**

The young men, who probably had never been outside their home country until they left Eindhoven, now made a momentous trip halfway around the world.

First they had crossed the border into Belgium, made a boat trip on the English Channel, possibly even saw the White Cliffs of Dover (if arriving in daylight) and then sailed up the Thames to Tilbury and crossed the English countryside by train.

But THE voyage of their young lives was no doubt sailing to Australia on an ocean liner, albeit a troop ship with all its discomforts.

The group that sailed on the *Rangitata* on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May consisted of 61 men, 51 of those to be trained as aircrew (11 trainee pilots) and the other 10 as ground crew.

This ship sailed in convoy, and was accompanied as far as America by a warship, but after that it was on its own.



**Panama Canal**

They sailed through the Panama Canal, where they had a stopover and shore leave in Panama City.

The rest of the voyage, via Wellington NZ, was uneventful, apart from a storm that disrupted one of the very welcome shows on board.

They arrived in Sydney on 20th June and docked at Woolloomooloo, from where they were bussed to Central station and from there went by train to Casino for the next stage of their life in the air force.

The *Arundel Castle* group consisted of 83 men of which 56 were trainee aircrew: 38 trainee pilots and 28 destined for ground crew.

They were also accompanied by other ships, among which was the *Volendam*, on which 50 of the original volunteers would eventually sail home over a year later.

The convoy left them near the Caribbean (Minderhout) and they entered the Panama Canal alone.

Passing through the Panama canal this ship was 'parked' in one of the lakes, waiting for its turn to pass through the canal proper and during this interlude the *'boys were allowed off the ship ....were allowed to swim in the sweet water – a welcome change after the salt water used on board for showers and washing'* (Weller).

Han Weller also mentions his impression of all lights blazing in the Canal Zone and in Colon, where they spent a day. After wartime Holland and England, this was indeed a sight to behold.

The lights were not the only attraction in Colon though and Ton Minderhout was having *'wild days and nights in the American Zone of the Panama Canal.'*

While Piet van Vegchel and his mates (*Rangitata*) during their stopover in Panama City, met a Polish shopkeeper and former sailor, who *'had been to Amsterdam, the Zeedijk, and he showed us around in Panama City in a decent manner'!*



The *Arundel Castle* arrived in Sydney on 7<sup>th</sup> July. and due to a 'wharfie' strike was delayed for 20 hours, which were spent '*anchored in the middle of the harbour east of the bridge and during the day the Australian troops were taken off the ship by smaller boats, while we were taken off the ship by what may have been a ferry and taken by bus to Central station*' (Dalmayer).

The spectacular trip through the Panama Canal made a big impression on some, while in other stories it rated very little mention; for some it may have been just another experience among the many new ones lived through.



Suez Canal

The third ship, the *Orontes*, which left from Glasgow, sailed through the Suez Canal. This ship did not leave until the 18<sup>th</sup> June and arrived in Sydney on 23<sup>rd</sup> July.

Of the 193 men on board 189 were meant for ground functions, the other four were to be air crew. These four went straight to Bradfield Park in Sydney – the others went to Melbourne and here most drop out of our story, though some eventually finished up in Casino and became part of our 'Casino boys'.

Accommodation on these ships was of course basic. Sleeping and eating was done in the same area below decks, as the better accommodation was reserved for the returning Australian and New Zealand servicemen, who were the main passengers on the ships.

The Dutchies slept in hammocks, which were strung at night above the tables where food was served at other times. In the morning the boys were supposed to fold and stow their hammocks 'in the correct manner' and the quarters had to be cleaned by them, not a very pleasant task. Some were seasick, which didn't help of course and keeping their quarters clean was at times a real challenge

The stale air below decks was not exactly appealing and some men moved to the upper deck at night, but had to make sure to get out of the way before being drenched by the ship's crew cleaning the decks each morning (Akkerman).

On some ships sleeping on deck was not allowed, on others it was no problem.

Special entertainment was provided by the returning Aussies and New Zealanders, who showed the Dutch boys what gambling was all about: two-up, cards with lots of money involved (Minderhout). '*The amount of money we were able to gamble with – 6d or so – must have looked funny to them*' (van Dyk).

One member of the returning troops must have run out of cash, as he raffled a very nice camera, which was won by Han Weller, who had to wait until they arrived in Wellington before he was able to get a film and use the camera. From that moment on it produced many of the photos that have been circulating and also remain in the archives of the 'Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie' in Holland.



During the voyage from Colon/Panama city to Wellington in New Zealand shows were put on, which were a huge success, even though at some occasions the shows were rudely interrupted by stormy weather (v.Vegchel, Minderhout). Lam v.d. Burg refers to the 'Zuiderzee Singers' on the *Arundel Castle*.

When the boys finally arrived in Wellington, the hilly and windy capital of New Zealand, they were able to spend the day there, sightseeing (and buying that elusive film, in which Hans van Gyen assisted, as his English was better than the average...). Wellington was their first sight of a city 'down under' – looking very different from the cities in the part of the world they came from, as well as being peaceful and not visibly affected by the war and it gave them a good impression of what was to come.

After this interlude it was a short sail to Sydney and on various dates the ships sailed through the majestic Sydney Heads and as Koos Dalmayer mentions: '*on 7.7.45 we saw Sydney Harbour Bridge for the first time!*'

Then as now a sight to behold and even more than the Opera House the symbol of Sydney.

The men now started their new lives literally at the other end of the world and in circumstances new and strange to them.

After disembarkation they were taken by double-decker bus to Central Station and put on a train to Casino in the North of NSW.

The train consisted of old wooden carriages, pulled by a steam locomotive and various comments were made about this trip (see chapter nine).

Arrival was at Casino South Railway station on 20<sup>th</sup> June (*Rangitata* group) and 8<sup>th</sup> July (*Arundel Castle*).

The three air crew trainees on the *Orontes* arrived later, after first having met up with the others in St. Ives, Sydney.



Sydney Harbour Bridge



## Chapter Four: In Casino and then to St. Ives

The country town of Casino where they arrived on various dates in June/July must have been a real surprise for the boys from Holland.

Wellington and Sydney were cities after all and green, but Casino was a rather small country town, built in a style not known in Europe and in an area that was often affected by drought.

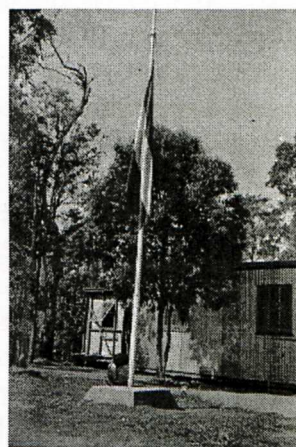
As it was, the area had just had a very *wet* period and part of the camp they went to had become a swamp (see Muys).

The first impressions of the Australian countryside were written down by Koos Dalmayer who said: *'we were taken from the station to Victory Camp over partly gravelled roads with dusty red soil. Our blue uniforms had an orangey tint when we arrived in D camp. The camp was about 3 kms. from Casino centre.'*

The dusty red soil was new to them then, but became a familiar sight, especially for those men who finally settled in Australia.

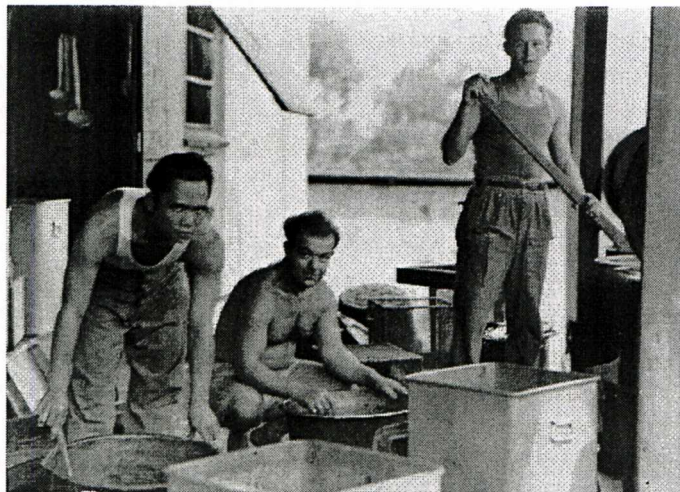
The camp was already occupied by troops from the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion infantry of the KNIL which was the NEI Army (see 'Javos of Casino') and had been declared Dutch territory in the early 1940s, a gesture from the Australian Government which it must have regretted when problems between Indonesia and Holland came to a head in 1945.

The camp was divided into six sections (see Dalmayer) and accommodation was in tents with stretchers. There was a Canteen of course, a hospital and a headquarters building and the Flag Post, where an Ambonese soldier blew the reveille each morning.



**The Flagpole**

Food was good and gave most men their first introduction to Indonesian cooking. Their first experience of sambal, then practically unknown in Holland outside the Indonesian community, is well documented in the boys' stories. The 'cuisine' was mainly based on rice, in order to get the men used to the food they would be eating in Indonesia. The cook 'Dikke Willem' was of course a well known and important figure!



**Dikke Willem and his staff**

This first stay in Casino was short, no more than three weeks for the second group to arrive, as the boys destined for aircrew were sent to St. Ives (a Sydney suburb) for jungle warfare training on the 29<sup>th</sup> July 1945. Here they were joined by the four air crew trainees who had arrived on the *Orontes* and later by a number of the boys who had originally gone to Victoria for ground crew training, but were now destined for Casino (see next chapter).



The boys who stayed on in Victoria do not figure in our Casino stories.

For their jungle warfare training in – of all places – St. Ives (now a middle class suburb, with large houses where the training ground once was) the men were housed in a camp on Mona Vale Road, which was the St. Ives Detachment of Bradfield Park Army camp, Lindfield.

The training was called jungle warfare training and consisted of learning to shoot and throw hand grenades, make booby traps with gelignite and crawl through the 'jungle', heavily decked out in branches...

All rather fun looking back...and hopefully enjoyed at the time as well.

And these activities led – again – to some interesting stories, like the following:

Not everybody has equally good motor co-ordination (control of movement) and Piet van Vegchel was one who seemed to have problems in this area. When marching he always started marching like a pacer and had to be corrected, but after a while he fell back into his most comfortable mode of walking.

So, throwing hand grenades was not really an easy exercise for him and therefore could be a danger to the others:

*Cor Koedam: 'we were in St. Ives receiving instructions on how to throw hand grenades.... After having been shown what to do, each one of us was to go forward about 5 metres from where we were gathered and stand in a dugout hole maybe 1.5 m deep and throw the hand grenade into the valley below. The idea was to pull the pin out with your left hand, if you were right handed, then bring your right arm back like the bowlers do and throw the grenade forward. Somehow Piet van Vegchel could not co-ordinate the correct action of when to release the grenade out of his hand. Instead of throwing it forward he released it when his hand was above his head, almost dropping it in the dugout and giving us standing behind the jitters. Any time when it was Piet's turn we would move back a bit further away from him.'*

Lam Vandenburg had other problems, this time as a consequence of rifle shooting, which landed him in hospital, where the Dutch spelling of his name led to some embarrassing confusion.

There were also very pleasant memories, as told by Koedam and Vandenburg, who enjoyed the singing-when-marching. The singing also entertained the children in the Margaret Reed hospital they passed along the way and they were at one stage invited to perform there, have a chat with the children and afterwards enjoy an afternoon tea Australian-style, with all the trimmings.

During their time off the men visited Sydney, where an R&R facility had been built in Hyde Park, complete with canteen and where dances and other entertainment were organised.





**Hornsby Hospital maternity wing**

It is interesting to note that this building was later transferred to Hornsby Hospital (Sydney) and became its maternity wing, in which Han Weller's second son was born 14 years later! Other facilities were the very popular Air Force House and the Dutch Club and there were of course numerous other 'cultural' activities of the type always available in a large city.

Trips were made as far away as Katoomba in the Blue Mountains and no doubt to other interesting places (Bobbin Head comes to mind). The boys made many friends during this period in Sydney – some of these friendships actually led to marriage while others were maintained long after leaving Australia.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1945 the war in the Pacific came to an abrupt end – totally unexpected and eventually completely changing all plans for the training of this contingent of volunteers.

But before leaving St. Ives the festivities around VP day were enjoyed in Sydney, which really went wild.

Some of the men later marched in the VP marches held in that city.

Whether a lot was learned in the way of jungle warfare is to be doubted and on 28<sup>th</sup> August the group returned by train to Casino.



**Nearing the end of the war in the Pacific**



## **Chapter Five: Back in Casino**

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of August the troops went back to Casino by train and on that date they were by special decree *temporarily* placed at the disposal of the Commander of the ground forces and incorporated in the First Battalion Infantry at Casino, which consisted of the 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and Staff Companies (Koedam).

Back in Casino the men were informed that major changes to the original plans for their training had been made, as the RAAF was no longer prepared to train aircrew and this made a lot of enthusiastic young men very disappointed to say the least! Some of the group who had useful technical skills were sent by train to Bundaberg, the rest stayed in Casino just 'waiting for things to happen'.

In the meantime the ground crew training in Victoria struck the same problems: the Australian Government allowed those men who were in the middle of their training to complete their courses, but no new courses would be offered.

After some false starts the Dutch army top decided that this could create problems for them, so the decision was made that only those who were prepared to sign a five-year contract with the KNIL would be able to complete their training. However, these contracts eventually proved to be invalid and generally those men who could not be placed elsewhere were transferred to NSW, together with those who had not been prepared to sign a long contract in the first place.

And that is how, on the 9<sup>th</sup> September 1945, a group of about 30 boys, who came out from Holland on one of the three ships, but were originally sent south for their training instead of north, eventually also finished up in Casino and there became part of the 'Casino Boys'.

Despite the disappointment most men settled down; they had no choice, for soon after returning from St. Ives things started to happen that again changed their situation completely.

After the war in the Pacific had ended, Indonesia declared its independence on the 17<sup>th</sup> August 1945 and soon most of the Indonesian soldiers in Australia decided they could no longer serve under Dutch command and asked to be demobilised and sent back to Indonesia, and when this request was refused downed arms.

The trouble apparently started in Bundaberg, but the non-Ambonese Indonesians in Casino also downed arms and it was decided to turn part of Victory Camp (Camp D) into an internment camp and send all conscientious objectors there in the first place.

*'It was on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1945 that 392 Javanese members of the KNIL were put behind barbed wire and housed in American Army tents' (de Wit).*

**The result of all this was that the boys who left Holland to become air force pilots were now infantry prison guards.**

This was a rather dramatic change, but nevertheless it was initially well enough accepted by the boys who had to do guard duties; after all, their roles were only to be temporary.





Temp. grave Snepvangers

In the meantime another dramatic happening shook the composure of the boys.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup>. September one of them, Simon Snepvangers, drowned in the Richmond River while swimming with a group of boys and some local girls.

This death had an enormous impact on the group and is mentioned by many in their stories.

The funeral was an official affair as Snepvangers was buried with military honours.

His grave was originally in Casino, but was later moved to Indonesia.

Despite the new situation, conditions in the camp were on the whole rather pleasant – accommodation as good or better than when they first came to the camp and the food still good, with Dikke Willem still looking after them.

From late May 1946 a weekly camp magazine named 'Aflos' (change of the guard) was published, edited by Nico van Peer. The size of this magazine (usually 12-14 foolscap pages) showed that the contributors were not otherwise kept busy, as lengthy stories were written by many of the boys about sport, jazz, books, radio, new technical developments and other interesting subjects.

News and sports results from Holland and from throughout the world made sure the magazine had something for everybody and kept the boys informed about what went on outside Casino.

In all only eleven issues were published, as publication ended shortly before 50 of the boys went home to Holland and the rest of the 90 gradually left the camp with other destinations. Some stories that appeared in 'Aflos' have been incorporated in the appendix.

Listening to stories and reading the various contributions to this publication and most of the copies of 'Aflos' (that were loaned to us by John van Dyk) we came to the conclusion that in general the boys led a fairly pleasant life and as one said: *'it was more like a holiday camp than a training camp for soldiers'* (van Arkel).

They got to know the local people, most acquired a girlfriend and some even became engaged (see Aflos list); how many of *these* engagements survived the end of the camp period we don't know, but other friendships eventually led to marriage and several of the boys married Casino girls and settled in the area.

We were lucky to get a contribution from one of those 'girls' Gloria, who married Jan de Wit.

Gloria de Wit writes how she never has been to the Camp, as visiting the camp was just *'not done— us Casino girls wouldn't dream of going there for any reason. You would be talked about in town.'*

But they met the boys 'in town' and there was plenty of opportunity to get together, for example at the dances that were held regularly.

The dances caused a bit of a stir in Casino, as the Dutch boys treated the girls in a more 'polite' way than the local boys did and so got into trouble with their competitors (van Vegchel).



And they visited the movies and saw many 1940s films, such as the Laurel and Hardy and 'Road' films, 'Saratoga Trunk' and other beauties of that period, now mostly forgotten.

While this entertainment was available in the town, in the camp itself the boys also found distractions of a lighter kind – some of which were not exactly regulation and raise a laugh every time they come up in conversation.

A few examples are introduced here – the full stories follow in chapter nine.

It was of course important to make life in the camp as comfortable as possible and having cold showers in winter (and it can get cold in Casino) was not comfortable at all, so the boys solved that problem by making sure in their own ingenious way that hot water became available (Dalmayer).



Haarmans (far right) in his jeep

And in a camp such as this a lot always depends on who the leaders are and how they 'get on' with their charges. One who rates a special mention was vaandrig (NCO) Haarmans, who struck the right note when he reacted positively after his jeep was 'borrowed' and on asking for an explanation, good humouredly accepted the cheeky explanation of the borrower (see story Dalmayer).

And in every army story there is a drill sergeant who can make life miserable, as John Muys experienced when he was sent running through the swamp in his newly dry-cleaned uniform.

And yes, they were **boys** and got themselves and sometimes others into trouble, not thinking about what they were doing until after the event – nothing much has changed one might say.

Han Weller gives an example in his story about 'how to blow up a tree and demote a sergeant'.

A consequence of all the 'unofficial behaviour' was that several of the men who wrote or told about this period, mentioned the 'petoet' or prison, where they spent 'imprisonment', varying from one night to two weeks.

Though they all admit that there were worse places to be than in the 'petoet' in Victory Camp.



The hockey team



Sports of course played a big part in their lives and they played soccer and hockey and some took part in athletics competitions.

The results of each week's games were published by 'Aflos' during the period it was published.

From September 1945 until the middle of 1947, of the boys still in Victory Camp several were sent to Indonesia in groups or individually and eventually the total number of the original Dutch air force trainees that was left in the Casino camp was approx. 90 (Kauffman).

Although life in the camp was seen by most of the 90 as relaxed and 'fun' (mostly in hindsight?) and more of a holiday than serious service, from time to time the mood was not exactly cheerful. The 'temporary' transfer to infantry seemed to become indefinite and some boys became really frustrated and showed their frustration in such a way that on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1946, visiting Lt. Col. Moquette wrote a report to his superiors in Batavia containing the following sentences: –*'some cases of undisciplined behaviour took place...'* but also *'I found that almost the whole group consisted of decent types...'* and *'I came to the conclusion that approx. 50% of the men in Casino are eligible for transfer to Holland to complete their air crew training there'* (Ward). And around the same time Army Chaplain Major M.Goudkamp wrote a letter about the same problems to Lt.Col H.E.Moquette in Melbourne. He had visited the camp and reported on his visits and was not impressed with what he found (see appendix). It is not known whether this letter was written before Moquette's report and whether it influenced his opinion in any way.

On 16<sup>th</sup> July 1946, not long before the boys were due to return to Holland, 'Aflos' had a sad story to tell: Kees van Esch died in an accident with a plane, which was reported as follows:

*'On Tuesday July 16<sup>th</sup> 1946, at a quarter past three in the afternoon, corporal MP Kees van Esch, army number 11131972 was hit by the propeller of an aircraft at the airfield of Casino, NSW. Australia and died from his injuries in the local memorial hospital at five o'clock that same afternoon.'*

*The solemn memorial service was held in the local Catholic church at nine o'clock in the morning of the day of the funeral, which took place with military honours at the military cemetery at Casino on Wednesday July 17, 1946.'*

As far as we know van Esch's grave was eventually also moved to Indonesia.



Temp. grave van Esch

Later in July the boys started to dismantle part of the camp; some of the boys had already left the camp and the main group would soon be leaving too – the camp would no longer be needed.

In August 1946 life in the camp came to an end for the 50 men who were to return to Holland for further training; the other 40 were eventually transferred to the ML ('militaire luchtmacht') and most of them went to Java, where some were given the opportunity to get further training or work in some capacity with the army (van Grinsven) until their demobilisation, while others carried on to Holland.



## **Chapter Six: Victory Camp as 'Prison' Camp**

When on the 17<sup>th</sup> August 1945 Indonesia declared its independence of the Netherlands, this led to many complications.

It is, of course, easiest to completely ignore this aspect of the camp as it remains a controversial subject. But it is amazing how often the prison camp (not its official title, but so named by all in the camp) situation and period crops up in stories, both written and verbal, of the Dutch boys who served in the camp and were suddenly given the job of guards of the Indonesian boys they previously served with.

The independence declaration cannot have come as a real surprise to both the Dutch and the Australians, as the Indonesians living and working in Australia since 1942/3 had been quite active in their independence movements (Lockwood).

The Dutch, however, would have none of this and plans were made to return to the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) to put some order back in the place as soon as the Japanese occupiers had been beaten.

To that end the air force volunteers were, after all, recruited in Eindhoven.

When the Dutch boys arrived in Victory Camp, there already were a large number of Indonesian/Dutch military personnel living there. They had become quite at home in Casino and were well accepted by the local population ('Javos in Casino').

The new Dutch recruits got on well with them and this did NOT change when the type of relationship between them changed.

After the downing of weapons by the majority of the Indonesian soldiers in the camp, augmented with conscientious objectors from other parts of Australia, the physical situation changed completely and the objectors suddenly belonged to the 'other side' and had to be separated from the serving men and locked up.

To this end part of the camp (D camp) was surrounded with barbed wire, most of which the Dutch soldiers had to install themselves.

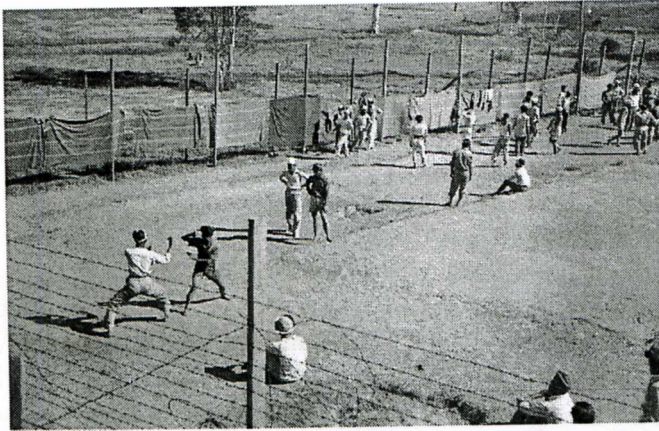
At first the accommodation for such a large number of people (a number came from other Dutch camps when these closed down) was a problem, but *eventually* the number of prisoners was reduced to 392 and their accommodation was the same as the original accommodation of the Dutch soldiers: army tents with stretchers to sleep on. They had their own cook, who prepared their 'local' cuisine and they organised their own entertainment such as dances and music, for which they made their own guitars.



**Prisoner camp with guard in foreground**

They also organised their own religious services and no doubt their political meetings. Medical care was provided by the hospital in the main camp, to which they were taken under guard as required (Weller).





Overview of prisoner camp grounds

to doze off during their night watch, when their superior was approaching by saying 'pssst, your Captain is coming!'

On one occasion the boys even managed to get the Indonesian prisoners' cook to make their favourite rice dish Nasi Goreng for them – whether this was officially arranged or just allowed we don't know, but it shows the good relationship between the Dutch boys and their charges.

Yes, there were watchtowers and yes the guards were armed, though the impression is that most guards would probably have been at a loss of what to do with their guns, had some trouble arisen (one said: fire into the air probably, to attract attention). They were certainly not keen to shoot their former colleagues. Nevertheless irregularities did occur and several Indonesians lost their lives during the existence of the prison camp.

Details of these sad happenings were meted out at length in the local and state-wide papers (The Sydney Morning Herald and The Casino Express). The reporting in these papers was rather neutral (as it should be of course) and nobody knew the exact details or, whoever did know didn't let on. One of the boys (van Heeswijck) writes about a very nasty experience he had during this period, about which I have been unable to get any official information and which few of the other boys in the camp knew about. Information about the prison camp and what took place there was extensively written about in Australia and it is a pity that no details were available to me from Dutch sources – it looks as if this part of history has been wiped off the books there.

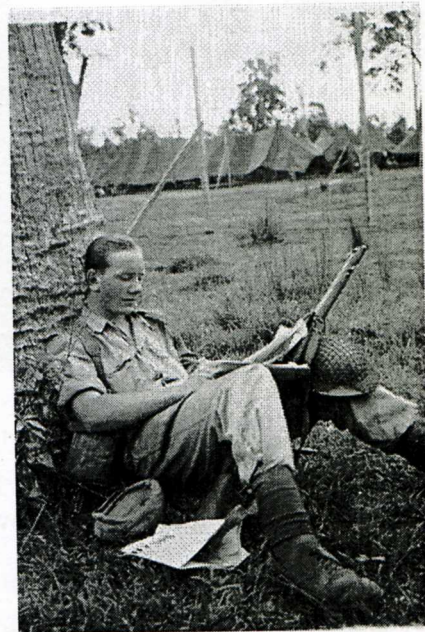
Even Ward circumvents it.

The result is a one-sided story whereas the truth, as usual, is no doubt somewhere in the middle.

Despite stories to the contrary, the relationship between prisoners and guards was relaxed and the Dutch and Indonesian boys chatted to each other and exchanged cigarettes for goodies the Indonesians were able to barter with.

Teun van Arkel mentions bartering a nice shirt and Han Weller a fancy military cap for cigarettes.

Jan Muys tells of the prisoners warning the guards, who tended



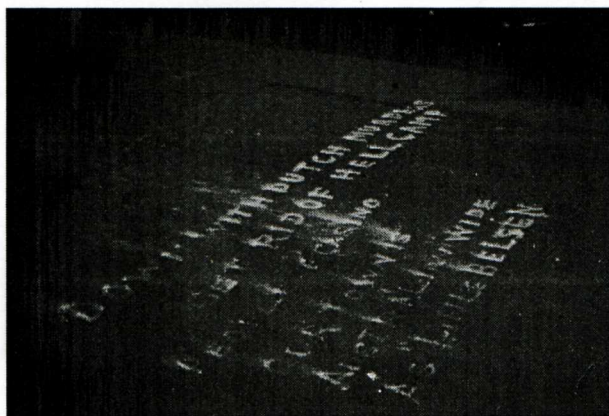
On guard duty?



Important is that – apart from van Heeswijck – none of the boys who served in the camp at the time have mentioned uncomfortable feelings about the period.

One of them said he was just not interested in the issue and preferred to do his job and enjoy life outside the camp.

And the people in Casino certainly didn't take the changes out on the young Dutch air force boys, despite the fact that some 'apparently communist' people tried to 'stir the pot'.



Graffiti\* on a Casino street

Of course most boys mention the black-banning of the Dutch ships and after the 50 air force trainees left for Holland, a number of the others were sent to the various harbours to load the Dutch ships, so that they could sail for Indonesia. And sail they did, much to the admiration of many Australians – but that is another story.

The boys who loaded those ships generally write about it in a positive manner and all preferred it to staying in Casino as prison guards.

As the 90 boys started leaving Casino from 16<sup>th</sup> August 1946 onwards, the Indonesians too were gradually moved and eventually most returned to their home country.

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\* The text reads:

Down with Dutch murders  
Get rid of hell camp  
People of Casino  
Our town is (known)  
Australian (sic) wide  
As little Belsen



## Chapter Seven: Going Home

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of August the time had come for the '50% of the men' to return to Holland to complete their pilot training. Fifty men left from Casino by truck to board the *Volendam* in Brisbane and the start of this trip was not without problems!

Their truck collided with a cow and so they were stuck with a damaged radiator 'along the way to Brisbane' until another truck could be arranged for them.

They made the ship with plenty of time left and departed as scheduled. Two more men



**Stuck on the road to Brisbane and home**

were picked up in one of the other ports and so a group of 52 young Dutch would-be pilots sailed for Holland and home, hoping no doubt that their original goal to become air force pilots, would finally be reached.

And most likely they were a lot wiser and maybe more cynical than they were when they left Eindhoven. They had grown from boys into men.

The ship called at Sydney, Melbourne and Fremantle and in *'Melbourne we saw one of our boys who went AWOL in Casino, on the harbour wharf waving us goodbye'* (Dalmayer). He was smartly dressed, showing how well he was doing in his new homeland! He waved his former colleagues off and more or less dropped out of the picture (though we did manage to find him when planning this book).

The other passengers on the *Volendam* were mainly Dutch 'repats': both people who had fled Indonesia when the Japanese overran their country and settled in Australia for the duration of the occupation and civilians who had been held in concentration camps in Indonesia by the Japanese and were liberated in 1945.

Among them were many young people, with whom the boys were able to mix freely, which made for a pleasant trip home. Some shows were organised by the passengers and enjoyed by all (see appendix).

The trip home went via the Suez Canal and was on the whole uneventful but enjoyable.

The *Volendam* arrived in Rotterdam on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 1946 and after a holiday of about a month, the men reported to Ypenburg air base, where they underwent a medical examination and received their Dutch (grey again) air force uniforms.

Koos Dalmayer asked to be transferred to ground crew while Ton Minderhout was reassigned to a meteorological course instead of a flying course and as a result he resigned from the air force, as did Vandenburg, Carpay, Baltussen and Smits.

This group was given leave until they were discharged in January 1947 and returned to civilian life.



The remaining boys – those who had passed their medicals – were sent to Twente air base, complete with a white peak in their caps, which showed the world they were pilots in training – at last.



At Twente air field they spent a very cold winter (one of the coldest on record up to that period) while they received training in meteorology and navigation and early in 1947 they were transferred to air base Woensdrecht for actual flight training.

Cap with white peak, denoting trainee pilot

Once there, however, they received the news that there was a three months wait before flying would start and this was too much for 10 of the men, who requested to be discharged and be allowed to go back to Australia – Cor Koedam: *'we saw Capt. Arends in The Hague, who arranged for us to go on the troop ship 'New Holland, which left on 9.7.1947 for Djakarta with a contingent of Dutch conscripts'*



Twente barracks built by the German army to look like farm houses

They spent four days in Batavia and were then flown by a Dutch air force plane with Australian crew (things DID get a bit muddled in those days; see also van Vegchel, flying with a Japanese crew in Indonesia and Japanese (ex?) prisoners doing some of the administration there) via Darwin to Brisbane. Then by train to Sydney, where they were discharged at the Dutch consulate on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1947.

Their civilian life had begun in Australia, where they settled and where none of them worked in a job remotely connected with flying – which had after all been one of the reasons why they had *originally* come to Australia.

For the boys who stayed on in the Dutch air force, their assignment ended on various dates during 1947 and many left the air force at that time. Of those who stayed on, some eventually did their flight training and became (air force) pilots or worked in the airline industry until their retirement.

In the meantime in Australia the forty men, who had stayed in Casino after the first fifty had gone home, were gradually transferred; some to Bundaberg and on to Indonesia and others to the various Australian harbours to load ships (see chapter 5). But by the end of 1946 they had all left Casino after all of the Indonesian prisoners had been transferred to Brisbane, from where, as already mentioned, they were repatriated to Indonesia.

The last remaining men were sent to Brisbane, *'where they boarded the Manoora for Batavia – the ship also carried cattle on deck'* (v.Grinsven).



Considering the circumstances at the time one may ask: who *loaded* those cattle, was that another job carried out by the 'air force'?

In Batavia Capt. Sleeboom, well known from Casino, was the camp commander and asked each of the men whether they wanted to go back to Holland or to Australia to be eventually discharged there. Kees v.Grinsven chose Australia, worked for a while in Indonesia but eventually arrived back in Australia and was discharged in Sydney on 24 May 1947. He was one of the few who did not return to Holland after service.

Another one was John Muys, who managed to stay in Australia and did not go to either Indonesia or Holland first.

Several boys returned to Holland on the *Kota Inten*, the first hospital ship that left for Holland, and most found it a terrible experience. But they found a very warm welcome when the ship arrived in Rotterdam, which may have made up for the rigours of the voyage.

Some of the men who were sent to Indonesia from Bundaberg received further training there as, for instance, air traffic controllers – see individual stories.

As far as we know all these men eventually returned to Holland or Australia, and to civilian life.

Of the men who settled in Holland after their return, a few later returned to Australia as migrants and eventually became part of the 'Casino Boys' group that had already formed here.

And thus became part of this book.



## **Chapter Eight: Sixty Years Later**

In the early 1960s Koos Dalmayer and Boele de Haan, who both lived in Casino at the time and saw each other regularly, were wondering what had happened to the boys who were in the Victory Camp in Casino.

Koos had a group photo and they tried to remember names, then looked them up in the phone book (Boele was working for the then PMG, now Telstra) and tried to make contact by phone.

Koos Dalmayer visited Holland and made contact with some of the boys there, as did Boele de Haan later on and that was the start of the eventual reunion in 1982.

Eventually Boele de Haan organised the 1982 reunion – he got together with Koos Dalmayer, Wim Driessen, and Jan de Wit and the result was that they decided a reunion of all the men they could get hold of would be a great idea and so they sent out the following letter, dated 16.5.1982:

*'Dear L-S-K-ER,*

*We the undersigned are trying to organise a reunion of old LSK-ERS this year, on the long week-end in October. With the vision of discussing a reunion in 1985 for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our arrival in Victory Camp, Casino.*

*If you know anyone interested please let us know, also addresses in Holland.*

*We will be extending invitations to all LSK-ERS in Holland (to see) if there is sufficient interest for the reunion this year.*

*Please let us know also if you need accommodation.'*

Letters were sent to those people whose address in Australia was known – no doubt the same or a similar letter was sent to the 'known' people in Holland.

And indeed more people were 'found' than appeared on the original list and the first reunion in Casino, held during the first weekend of October 1982 was a success. Consequently it was decided to have the next reunion in 1985 and after that every two years.

The reunion in 1987 was held in Sydney, but eventually a location was chosen that was more central for people from both north and south and from 1995 on they met in Coffs Harbour in NSW. And it was soon also decided to make the reunion a yearly event, taking into account the fact that 'we all are getting older and lots can happen in between reunions'. Make hay while the sun shines, so to speak.

Over the years the group attending the reunions has become smaller: many LSKers (and partners) have died since the first reunion was held and others found it more difficult to travel and so the numbers went down from 34 in 1987 (and more at times) to 18 in 2006, of which only seven were old LSKers; the others were their wives or widows. At times there were visitors from Holland e.g. Bep en Ton Minderhout attended when they lived in Sydney and returned a few times after they had retired in Holland.

Other Dutch attendees included Jan van Dijke and Piet Kersten and their wives.

The atmosphere during the reunions has always been cheerful and happy and every time the men start talking together about the past, (funny) stories about their time in the camp are part of the conversation.



As we mentioned: stories that should have been put on tape or on paper long ago.

Fortunately at this late date we have still been able to find enough people willing to delve into their past and come up with interesting memories and anecdotes and write them down (no mean feat!).

Those memories helped support this history and have been attached in full at the end of this book.

The final question to be answered is:

How did the young boys who came to Australia in 1945 fare after they left the air force?

Of those that – eventually – came to live in Australia permanently, none became pilots.

Most married and had children, they made a place for themselves in this country, generally were comfortable and retired from a variety of jobs and professions.

Of the boys who stayed in Holland at least one became an airline pilot and several worked for the KLM in various capacities.

They also have retired by now and many get together at the yearly reunion at air base Soesterberg, where last year the Australia and Malacca groups were especially celebrated.

Several of the Australian contingent attended the Soesterberg reunions at various times and visited old mates in their home country.

What is especially interesting and very positive is the fact that the ties that were forged during their time in Australia, still bind the men who originally were and still are to us 'The Casino Boys' that inspired this story.

May they keep coming together for a long time to come and keep sharing and enjoying their memories of this most interesting period in their lives.



Coffs Harbour Reunion, 2006

left-right: Cor Koedam, Han Weller, Lam Vandenburg, Koos Dalmayer,  
Kees van Girsven, and Do Blauw



## **Chapter Nine: Personal Stories**

As they say: all people are the same and all people are different.

And so it is with the attached stories:

They have all been written about the same period and are, in a way, the same and yet at the same time all different.

This is a collection of stories about a period of history, seen through the eyes of elderly men, looking back on an unusual and very important period in their lives.

Though the *basic* facts of what took place during this period are the same for all, each interprets them differently and highlights different aspects of their service with the Dutch LSK.

I had originally been looking for anecdotes, but finished up with a number of complete stories of the period under discussion and so I had to find the personal stories that were hidden in the whole, to illustrate the history that runs like a thread through this period.

I was also able to talk/listen to several of the men and I have tried to faithfully record what they told each other (while I listened on) or me personally.

I had set a limit of 800 words, thinking this would be sufficient and indeed some contributors stayed within this limit, but generally the stories became quite long and as they are all interesting, the idea of short anecdotes only was abandoned and the stories are generally published as received.

Some contributions had to be translated from the Dutch, others slightly edited because of format and length.

I have made no changes to dates or (place) names, unless absolutely necessary for easier understanding of the story.

The stories published are as close to the originals as possible and that is what we set out to do: get the 'true' stories on paper as a joint biography of Victory Camp in Casino.

We hope that the stories will rekindle old memories for all who were involved in the 'Casino Boys' period and explain a few things to 'outsiders' who will read this book.

Written contributions are by:

Teun van Arkel.

Theo (DO) Blauw

Koos (Jack) Dalmayer

Jo van Dijk (Dyk)

Gijs Eikelenboom

Peter Faessen

Kees van Grinsven

Boele (Martin) de Haan *by Dorothy de Haan*

Eric van Heeswijck

Jan (John) Ivits

Gerard Kloppenborg

Cor Koedam

Jan Koster

Johannes (Jan) Kuypers

Ton(y) Minderhout

Jan Muys

Lam van den Burg (Vandenburg)

Piet van Vegchel

Jan van der Waerden

Han(s) Weller

Arie van de Wetering

Jan de Wit *by Gloria de Wit*





### **Teun van Arkel**

Thanks for asking me to write down my story about my period as OVW-LSKer.

The 'opkomst depot' (enlistment office) started in February 1945 was in the Rechtestraat in MY Eindhoven (where I was born and grew up: 'gepakt en gemazeld').

It was in the building where previously Witteveen and other shops were situated; that, as far as I know, was the only enlistment office in the liberated part of Holland.

After a few weeks we left via Belgium (Oostende in my case) to go to England.

A small group, including Henk van Akkeren, went to Bundaberg and most of the rest to Casino.

I spent some time in Bacchus Marsh and Ascot Vale (Vic) but was then also sent to Casino – the reason being that I did not sign a long contract [see history].



**Arriving in Casino - Teun second row, third from left**

Plenty is known about the period in Casino and no doubt many of the others that stayed there will have told their stories.

Yes, Casino also became a prison camp, but the prisoners were not prisoners of war but conscientious objectors, who previously had been members of the Dutch-Indonesian air force, navy, infantry etc.

As a result of the problems surrounding this period (independence of Indonesia)

the Dutch ships in the various Australian harbours were black banned from September 1945 and as a result I, among others, worked as a wharfie – we were well paid!!!!

But this was later on – while we were in Casino and all through the time the camp also became a prisoner camp, the relationship with the local inhabitants was very good.



After the Casino period we were transferred to Holland Park (Brisbane) in October 1946, where we met several Indonesians who we had guarded in Casino before!

No problems there either.

After a few weeks we left Australia for Indonesia with two freighters with passenger accommodation and went first to Macassar (Celebes now Sulawesi) and after a few days on to Surabaya (Java) and finally to *Tanjong Priok*, the harbour of then Batavia, now Djakarta.

We were billeted by the LSK, in a section named Goenoeng Sahiri.

On the ship my superior was Sergeant Bep van Klaveren, who during the 1936 Olympics became fourth in the championships boxing.

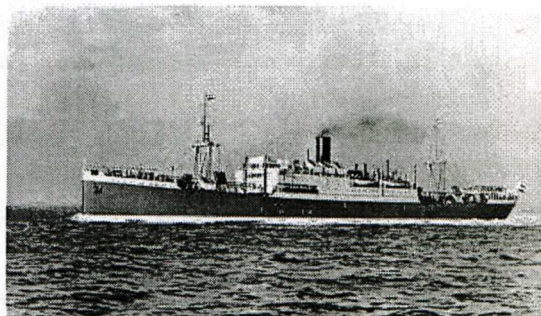
Bep was in the U.S.A. when the war started in Europe and couldn't get back home to Holland. He finally finished up in Brisbane where I met him – he called me Teun the cauliflower head.

Bep became European champion at the age of 39 in 1949 – in Rotterdam you will find a statue of him.

But returning to Batavia, where we stayed with a small group including Tony Dokters, Sjef van Rooy (both no longer with us) and after a while we were informed that we were listed for return to Holland, in the first hospital ship that returned to Holland, the 'Kota Inten'.

Well, that was a terrible experience, unimaginable; there were not only serious physical casualties on board, but also people with serious mental problems.

Arriving in Rotterdam harbour we were welcomed by many boats, horns hooting, calling us welcome home. I will never forget that.



*The Kota Inten*

Also the late Prins Bernhard (HRH) was present in the welcoming party and he came aboard.

Everybody received a certificate from him and he told us that we could always count on him and approach him for assistance with any problems.

I also have such a certificate (see next page) which I did not really deserve in my opinion.

After six weeks on board of that hospital ship I came to the conclusion that our time in Australia, especially in Casino, was a travel club experience!

After some weeks in Holland – yes, Eindhoven – I went back to work for N.V. Philips. I have 4 years day- and 2 years evening school training in the unique Philips training school.

In 1961 at the end of February, I went back to Oz with my family on the invitation of the ANU – I worked in the John Curtin School of Medical Research, where I could use and show my training!

After all these years I still have very good contact with many 'old mates' and their families, both in Australia and in Holland – too many to mention here.



But before I sign off: Kees van Grinsven, do you still have that special shirt that I bartered for you with the Indonesians? You supplied the cigarettes so were involved in the bartering complot!

T. H. VAN ARKEL

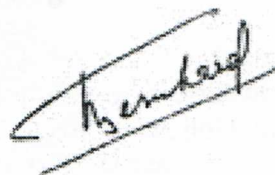
Army - Aircraft.

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Aan de repatriërende militairen aan  
boord van de KOTA INTEN

**B**ij uw terugkeer in het vaderland  
heet ik u van harte welkom. Uw taak buiten  
Europa is voor de meesten uwer ten einde; anderen  
zullen haar voortzetten naar het voorbeeld dat  
gij hebt gegeven. Het offer dat velen uwer hebben  
gebracht is zwaar, maar het is gebracht voor de  
vrijheid van miljoenen onzer medemenschen.  
Straks zult ge in de maatschappij een nieuwe taak  
hebben te vervullen. In vele gevallen zullen de  
gevolgen van de opgedane verwondingen dit niet  
gemakkelijk maken. Het is de plicht van het  
geheele Nederlandsche volk u te helpen de plaats  
te vinden waar gij het land naar uw beste  
krachten kunt blijven dienen, evenals ge dit gedaan  
hebt van het eerste uur af dat ge werd geroepen.  
Waar het de verdediging van uw belangen  
betreft kunt ge erop rekenen dat ik achter u sta.

1 Februari 1947



Letter signed by HRH Prins Bernhard der Nederlanden





### **Theo (DO) Blauw**

I was not going to share my memories with anyone, but I changed my mind and here then a few memories from a once eternal volunteer. Many dates and names I have since forgotten but I will do my best.

Under the smoke-cloud of a just torpedoed oil tanker we left Blankenberge in Belgium, set for the white cliffs of Dover. Depth charges were thrown overboard but we did not see any blood. I was standing on deck of this little tub, about 750 tonnes, Graff 'something' next to a shell shocked Frenchman. He had it real bad and was trying to bite the 3 inch rail that ran around the ship. I tried to say something to him in my best French and he looked at me with the biggest frightened eyes I have ever seen. Marie Antoinette going under the guillotine could not have been more scared, I am sure.

We arrived safely at Dover [actually Tilbury] where we boarded a train to Wolverhampton. The seats in the carriages were covered with plush material. It had a few 'crawlies' living in it. At destination I was itching all over and I remember some attendant coming over and dusting me with something.

One Sunday morning a number of us went for a walk including a skinny fellow who in the middle of the paddock threw a tantrum which I cured with belting him with a stick over his backside. He did not have to go to the doctor for a pill, he was instantly cured.

Another day after a lot of talking in the barrack, Jo Plomp decided it was 9 o'clock and he was going to 'turn over'. Now I had known Jo since I was about 5 years old; we lived in the same street and he was a good friend. He went to bed. So I called on the fellows to give me a hand as Jo wanted to be turned over. We took the side of his stretcher and turned him over, stretcher on top... It was rather hilarious!!!

I always enjoyed walking through "Tattershall" (if I remember that name correctly). [Tettenhall] One day I was invited to come into one of those grand villas. It was roomy and it looked more so as there was not a stick of furniture in it. My stunned look drew an explanation: 'The furniture has all been put into storage whilst the war was on'.

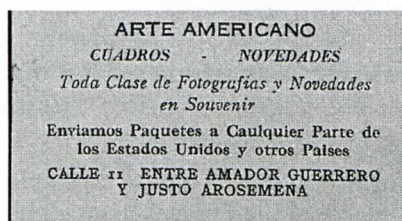
V.E. Day came, amidst wild celebrations and dancing in the streets my cap was snatched and thrown in the air. I felt rather naked without it, but then the girls were lovely and the crowd hilarious! What a day!



Shortly thereafter we left England on the *Arundel Castle*, a huge ship with a lot of ex prisoners of war on it, mainly New Zealanders. Two Up was played every day. A hand full of notes one minute, hardly any the next. And the singing: 'On the Road to Mandalay' etc. etc. and the jokes - I only remember a few rude ones so I will not list them.

We sailed through the Panama Canal with its 'locks', quite a sight and the American guards a sight to behold too in their silver uniforms with heavy black belts and high black boots.

Not that I had a camera then; you were not allowed to take photos anyway, but the memories live on.



We zigzagged our way to New Zealand, a trip of about 3 weeks. A few depth charges now and then, plenty of entertainment and I enjoyed every bit of it. I remember giving lessons in the working of motors etc. to those who were interested. Then came the day we landed in Wellington N.Z. We met a fellow who invited us to his home. His wife was German by birth and she longed to speak German with someone. I told him that my German was not my best subject, as I refused to speak it during the war. Anyhow he pointed us to a nice restaurant where we were treated royally with a beautiful free dinner with beef and vegetables and squashed carrots?? - I had pumpkin for the first time in my life. The lady owner came over and chatted with us and then she asked if we were free that evening and would we like to go to a party? Well, that did not fall on deaf ears. With her limousine, chauffeur driven, we were taken up high into the Wellington Hills. There was a kitchen party for one of the ladies getting married the next Saturday. So many lovely girls, we were spoiled and it was marvellous. Afterwards we were driven back to the *Arundel Castle*. For the first time I was driven through an immensely long tunnel. Quite a new experience.

Years later I met one of the ladies from the party in Sydney. Her name was Audrey Ogilvie, a lovely girl. But by then I was married...!

We left New Zealand with great expectations of what was ahead. Sydney next port of call and it was majestic!

The mast of the *Arundel Castle* was too tall so we could not go under the Sydney Harbour Bridge [see other stories for real reason] and anchor was dropped east of the bridge on the North Sydney Side. We were ferried across into Sydney by small boats. Cannot remember much of that.



We were put on the train, destination Casino. Saw kangaroos on the way.

On arrival at the camp the first job was: Put up your own tent, wooden floor and stretchers again. Get some blankets and immunizations for whatever and a few gadgets useful for dinner. Got some training in marching and whilst most of us were shown what a rifle looked like a few of the more adventurous fellows, cannot remember their names, came racing past us on horseback. They got the horses from the farm behind the camp.

It was really what we used to call 'De hap van Jan': good fun.

What I remember best of Casino is the water tower, never seen one before.

One Sunday going 'home' I found a huge lizard, easily 2.5 feet long. It was cold and stiff and I took it to the camp and put it under the blankets in John Kuypers' bed.

And then of course there were the floods followed by droughts. Nothing has changed in that regard and after more than 60 years it is still the same ... a flood or a drought.

After a while in Casino we packed up for St. Ives. Jungle training!! My bed consisted of 3 boards, one flat the other two at an angle upwards from the base, straw and there you have it. St. Ives, it was a beautiful wilderness area then, throwing hand grenades and learning all about Bren Guns and who could take them apart and put them together again fastest. And then the Fridays going to Sydney, the Trocadero to dance the night away, where the Yanks did their 'jitter bugging'? I used to go there with Nic van Peer and Kees van Esch. We used to meet the same girls every Friday night and took them home after the dance to Stanmore, where they lived. Met their parents and had a cup of coffee with them before going back to our bunks.

I liked that Trocadero and the Dutch club in the Kembla building, where sergeant Bakker was the manager and cooked a beautiful Hungarian Goulash and pea soup and then there was the Andronicas coffee shop a bit closer to the Quay on George Street. The aroma, you could smell it miles away. There was standing room only in that shop, closely resembling a tin of sardines. The huge tents in Hyde Park were the Aussie Girls made tea, coffee, sandwiches and cakes for the servicemen and women from everywhere. The place was alive and you could dance till you dropped.

I remember an old swaggie I met in Elizabeth Street, asking me for two bob because he wanted a drink. I would not give him any money but he showed me the wine bar. We had a glass of red wine; I thought it was terrible stuff so I left and let him finish my drink as well. Yes Sydney: a town with a thousand stories.

But as they say in German: 'Im Leben geht alles fürüber, auch das Glück doch zum Glück auch das Leid' and so the war came to an end. It was VP day and we danced in Martin Place and for the second time I lost my cap. The crowds were wild, the world came alive, how lovely it was just to be part of all that. It was about a quarter to two in the night when we met the sergeant major from the camp - cannot remember his name (I met him many years later and if I remember correctly he ran a service station in the Blue Mountains). He did not know how to get home either and took us to Wynyard station and there we slept on the seats!!

Who says jungle training would not come in handy one day.

Said goodbye to St. Ives and Sydney and away to Bundaberg. We arrived there 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1945 at our new camp at the Bundaberg Air base. I think it was called Heinkler or something. I think it was the first Saturday afternoon in Bundaberg, we

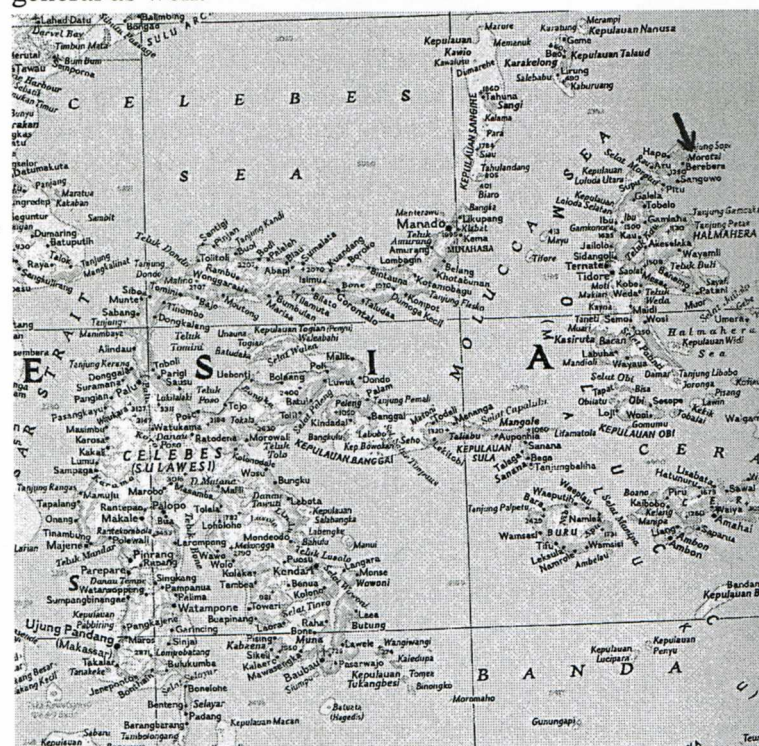


were looking at people playing bowls (never seen that before) when an old fellow came up to us and asked if we would like to have a drink with him. 'But of course we will have a drink with you' we said.

We were strange in town and did not know where he was going. Anyhow we finished up at what looked like his bachelor flat. There was a single bed in the place and two chairs. We sat down as he took out of a cupboard a blue enamel jug with a cone top and nozzle on top. He took the cork out and filled two stone 'hospital' type cups rather full with rum and gave us one cup each. It did not look all that appetising. He went to sit on the bed, put his finger in the small handle on the top side of the jug and manoeuvred the jug over his shoulder with the nozzle to his mouth and 'cluck cluck' he had a few sips of the stuff. We followed and took a sip as well. It was terrible stuff. Not wanting to leave our drinks and as such offend our generous host I said to John 'let's drink it and get out of here'. No sooner said than done. It went down all right but the getting out of here ... Well thereby hangs a tale: we do not know how we ever got out of that place! We never knew and still do not know to date how we came back to the camp.

Since then we have tried to find out where the old man took us but to no avail. Neither did we see the old man ever again. Maybe he wanted us to be there for his swan song... I will never know, what a pity!!

Work at the airbase was very rewarding and I learned a lot and enjoyed Bundaberg in general as well.



Map of Celebes (Sulawesi) showing Morotai (red arrow)

go very fast, say 325 miles an hour in a dive. During that trip I realised more than ever before how a plane slides through the air. There was a bullet hole in the fuselage where I could put my finger through; it was as if my finger went through treacle or some sort of heavy liquid. We arrived four and a half hours later. A small welcoming group was waiting. At first they thought that we had taken a dive. We had our work

15 October 1945 the captain who ran the show (I cannot remember his name) came up to me and asked if I wanted to go to Morotai. There were two B25s that were stranded and needed repairs. 'But of course' I said.

I packed a few things and by 10 am we were off with a new motor in the bomb bay to Celebes in the East Indies. It was a long trip over, especially when one of our motors conked out about one and a half hours out of Darwin. The B25 was a nice plane but it did not



cut out. Our group consisted of four men, the boss, Sergeant- Major Bauermann, a Javanese and an Ambonese and myself. The S.M. and I in one tent, the Indonesians in another. The latter two worked on the planes as well but also did the cooking cleaning and making the beds. One day driving very fast to the airstrip we hit a wild pig. So as soon as we came on the job these two went back home to prepare dinner. On another day the major and I found two canoes obviously left behind by the Japanese. So we decided to go fishing; I am not a fisherman at all but as luck had it I caught a big one. I pulled it up to show my mate and he called back 'Hey Do, don't pull him in your boat, he will bite your foot off, it's a barracuda'. Not that that meant anything to me, but I could see its head and teeth. I handed my rod over to the major and as he called out to the two Indonesians to come and kill the fish, with a masterly swing he threw the fish onto the beach. With some clapper [coconut] milk from the palms around us we had again a beautiful dinner. Work progressed well. One day I wandered off into the forest to see what was there to be seen and there I made a friend. A little grey monkey. He climbed on my shoulder and for about four weeks he was my companion wherever I went. It was a Saturday afternoon and I was a bit bored so I asked the major if I could go and learn to drive. No problem he said and he gave me the keys to the jeep and twenty minutes later I came back to ask him if he could pull me out of the ditch along the road. He took the truck and pulled me out. 'Do', he said 'this is the first and the last time I'll do this'. 'I understand' I said and we went our ways.



**Morotai main road**

I learned to drive in the rimboe [jungle]. Subsequently I spent one weekend with a family in the kampong, (forgot the name of the place) just along the ocean shore. On the boats fish was hanging and drying in the open. We had square pieces of fish in vinegar and chillies for dinner - these people were so sweet and gentle. It was a pleasure to be with them and experiencing such hospitality. Unbelievable.

As time passed NICA [Netherlands Indies Civil Administration] put a tent camp up not far from us for mixed race people that had been in Japanese prison camps. On seeing me running around with a monkey they asked my boss if I could get rid of it as they were afraid that it might bite one of their children. I brought it back to the forest where I had found it. It was a rather sad farewell.

Christmas time came very close and work was almost done. The major had made acquaintance with an Indonesian family. They had killed a goat

for Christmas and had invited the four of us to join them for Christmas dinner. Well, that was something to look forward to, a great experience!

Yes but... we had fixed the planes and our work here was now finished. It was early 24 December 1945, we had to leave our plane in Morotai. We said goodbye to our Christmas dinner and left. The NICA had fitted out a DC3 with Hessian hammocks for repatriating people to go to Australia and so I now had to sit with the same people who denied me a monkey. There was a spare wheel on the floor I made that my seat. I could easily move around and grin when I heard them get sick in the paper bags. I realized that it was a useless revenge...



We landed in Bundaberg about 4 o'clock in the afternoon I got an extra 14 days off *for volunteering to work in Morotai.*

My first holiday I went to Sydney with a pilot and we stayed at the 'Spring Inn' at 'Kings Bloody Cross' all expenses paid. That made up for a lost Christmas dinner. The next holiday I went with - cannot remember his name - and we went to Mornington in Victoria; we travelled around a bit and visited the Dutch club frequently for, I forgot (it was a green liqueur) [crème de menthe] with a whisky chaser. Potent stuff.

Worked a few months at the 'drome in Bundaberg. Next I was asked if I wanted to volunteer to go to Tocumwal. There were a number of Lockheed lightning planes that had to be fixed up under a lend/lease deal with America. I realized that it would be cold down there. We were given plenty of woollen underwear, overcoats as well as Red Infantry boots from the Australian Army. We were equipped ready and eager to go. We were booked into a nice hotel/restaurant. Picked up in the mornings and brought home after we had enjoyed the Aussie sergeants' mess. We always had a solid feed with eggs and steak before having drinks. It was good fun. They tried to drink us under the table but with our bellies full of solid food, it did not happen once. I made myself another solid case [for use as cabin trunk] to take stuff home whenever that time would come. We enjoyed working here and soon had many friends. One fellow named Erick took us home one Saturday. He lived with his parents in a very nice weatherboard house close to Menzies Puffing Billy railway station. I have since tried to find it without success. Other Saturdays we went to Melbourne for the weekend. Can you imagine six men all in heavy overcoats in a Morris Minor with canvas top with plenty of air holes in same. But it was all great fun. The car belonged to a private electrician who worked at the Tocumwal aerodrome. Sunday night (2.00 am Monday!) we were picked up to go back to work in the morning. Talking about burning the candle at both ends...

Whilst in Melbourne one day I met two old classmates. They had the rank of Vaandrig and they had changed over to the meteorological services and invited me to join them. I gave it some thought but then thought the better of it: counting cumuluses and blowing up balloons?? My memory flashed back to the *Arundel Castle* where someone had given our girls a few condoms. Being as good as we were in those days the girls thought they were balloons and blew them up and with a bit of string tied them onto the railing on the back deck. No, I decided to stay with the dog that I knew after all my good experiences and fun I had. And did that turn out to be a dirty bitch!

Then came the word that this good life cannot go on for ever. Back to Holland and on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1946 we boarded the *Volendam*. They were going to make soldiers out of us back home. If I remember correctly we were with 50 men.

We arrived in Holland on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1946 and were given a month's holiday.





## Koos Dalmayer

We were liberated in Oct. 1944. In December we heard by word of mouth of a recruiting centre that would be opened in Waalwijk in the 'Patronaats gebouw' in the Grote straat for Waalwijk and surrounding area. Many districts were opened, I think Waalwijk was No.10 incorporated in our LSK number - mine was 10.130110.

I think 10 was the district, 1 OVW [war volunteer], 3 Air Force, and 0110 and the rest were enlisting numbers.

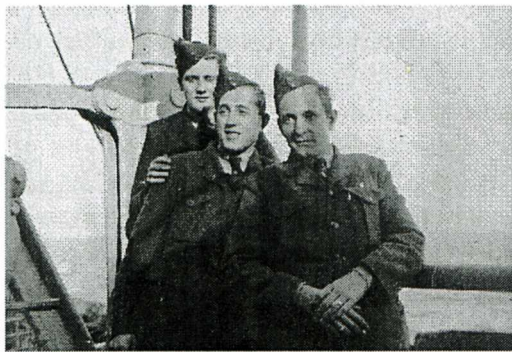
Other districts where recruiting centres were opened were Breda, Den Bosch, Middelburg, Zuid Limburg, and Nijmegen.

On 20.3.45 I was called up to go to Eindhoven in an Army truck. We had 10 days in Eindhoven for Medical, Aptitude test, and an interview with Dutch Air Force officers about one's life. We received our English uniform and were put into 'Pool-Flight' to do all kind of little jobs and to learn a bit of discipline.

Our group left 31.3.45 to go to Blankenberge, Belgium and had to wait till 3.4.45 before we could sail to England with a boat called *Ulster Monarch* to Tilbury, England. This waiting time was because there were too many 'U' boats (German) in the area.

We arrived next day, 4<sup>th</sup> April (the trip was made during the night) in Tilbury. From there we went by train to London and on to Wolverhampton, to Wrottesley Park (a camp between Birmingham and Wolverhampton). When we arrived there, there were already two barracks full of Air Force men ex-Eindhoven.

After that more groups arrived from Eindhoven; only those for Air Force training in Australia were sent to Wolverhampton, those training in England were sent to other camps.



On the *Arundel Castle* - Koos on the left

On the 24th April 1945 we all went by train to London to change our grey English RAF uniforms for blue RAAF Australian uniforms.

On 8.5.45 the first group left for Australia, 2 barracks plus 3 out of our barrack left with the *Rangitata*.

The second group left Liverpool on the 30th May 45 in the *Arundel Castle* with two escorts as far as the Canadian Coast and from there we went south to the Panama Canal.



We went ashore in Colon and then carried on to New Zealand.

We never saw MONDAY 2.7.45 (because of the date line) and arrived in Wellington on 3<sup>rd</sup> July and left the next day for Sydney, where we arrived at 7 o'clock in the morning and saw the Harbour Bridge for the first time on 7.7.45.

We had to stay on board; they were afraid we could get lost before we had to leave at 8 pm for Casino. During the day, the head of the Dutch Air Force (Lt.Col. Fiedeldy) visited the ship. A lone Dutch airplane also flew over the ship during the day.

After we were taken off the ship we went by bus to Central Station, where we met a Dutch family who lived in Australia and asked us about their family who lived in 'Zuid Holland' [name of province, actually north of the big rivers]. We had a long talk with them but did not have too much information for them.

We saw a girl pouring milkshakes and Toni Minderhout bought a pineapple, which we slaughtered afterwards with a little pocket knife - what a mess.

We left by train to Casino and had breakfast at Coffs Harbour and Toni Minderhout discovered a map of NSW on the wall of a carriage, which showed the NSW Railway system and after we passed Grafton he announced that the next stop was our destination: Casino.

So all the boys got ready and packed up, not knowing we still had 3 hours to travel!

It is very difficult to change your thinking from Holland to Australia, especially relating to distances.

On 8.7.45 we arrived in Casino at 1 pm and were taken from the station to Victory Camp over partly gravelled roads with dusty red soil. Our blue uniforms had an orangey tint when we arrived in D Camp. The camp was about 3 km from Casino Centre on the Kyogle Road; alongside the Camp was Reynolds Road.

The Camp was divided into sections called:

- Camp A: Near Kyogle Road, used for training in operating bulldozers & other machinery and drill towers (now used by Council Waterworks).
- Camp B: Technical Battalion, workshops & stores. (The Lawn Cemetery).
- Camp C: Headquarters & Hospital & Flag Post.
- Camp D: Over the creek and against a slope (later prison PLOT).
- Camp E: Or TOP Camp over the hill where the big Canteen was and the first group was stationed before we left for St. Ives.
- Camp F: Over the hill towards the swamp 'the less said the better'.

All the Air Force boys who were in Casino at the time left on the 30th July '45 for Sydney and were stationed in St. Ives, where they lived in tents. They went there for jungle warfare training.

Ground crew recruits went to Melbourne.

After capitulation by the Japanese in August, all St. Ives boys went back to Casino by train on 28.8.45.

Arriving at Casino the group was split up; a number of the boys went back on the train for Bundaberg and the rest stayed in Casino. We were stationed in Top Camp.

On 9.9.45 a group of about 25 LSK boys arrived in Casino Camp from Melbourne. Also about this time a lot of West Indies boys under Capt. I. Sleeboom arrived.

We had to do training.





On parade - Koos is 3<sup>rd</sup> from right

In top camp there was a training ground with obstacles, we also did long marches and a couple of times training on the rifle ranges started a grass fire.

We had to do guard duty at the ammunition depot down the hill from top camp and up another hill; there was a goat track to walk on and it was slippery, especially on very dark nights.

Various things happened during this period.

On 22.9.45 we were reshuffled into Peloton [platoon] and Section and had to change tents

On Sunday 23.9.45 Simon Snepvangers drowned in the Richmond River; his funeral was on 25.9.45.

At this time we were not allowed to leave the camp, because we had to be ready to leave for the Dutch East Indies to do police duties; we were transferred from the LSK to the infantry.

Luckily we never made it to Indonesia, though several of the boys left the camp for that destination, including Simon Ruijtenberg, Jan van Vegchel, Stef van Breugel and others.

On 19.11.45 I became the schrijver [administration clerk] of the 12th Co.

In Oct.1945 a group of Indonesian KNIL boys came to the camp and were locked up in a barrack with an area fenced off with barbed wire and we had to do guard duties.

It was below top camp. Later we had trouble with the other KNIL boys who 'stopped work'.

I remember a meeting of these boys with the officers in 'C' camp and us Dutch boys had them encircled with 5 bullets each in the magazine of our rifles. Later we surrounded a section of the camp with a barbed wire fence and the KNIL boys who were on strike were locked up in that area.

All the Ambonese boys were still free, as they sided with the Dutch.

Now it was guard duties all the time: 3 days on, 3 days off. First we had four watch towers, later five.

The guard was divided into 3 groups: A) on guard, B) sleeping, and C) work duties.

It was a rotten job. The camp was next to the town garbage tip and we had the flies by day and mosquitoes (Scotch guys) by night.

I became a self-appointed and accepted liaison person between the officers and the boys. I had to listen to grievances and talked it over in the office.

We came to the decision that, if any boys were doing longer than 3 days guard duty, they could take more time off later on and we made up a contract in the office signed by all involved. They could also receive 10/3 - 10 shillings 3 pence - for not eating in the camp. It was also agreed that the boys could again take foodstuffs to families they visited in Casino - especially those goods that were on coupons such as butter - with a permit issued by the office.



Before the barbed wire fence was established and the boys were free to roam around Casino, an MP Division was formed with Sgt. Henk Fransen in charge and the rest were Corporals with a jeep, stationed in Camp C.

There was a lot to do in the camp. We had to build a special grease trap for the kitchen - a big wooden contraption about 3 meters x 1.1/2 m x 1.1/2 m deep, divided into 4 sections, with above and under the divisions openings to trap the grease.

The water supply also had to be improved - the supply stopped when the tank was empty and the electric motor had to be switched on by hand. We made it automatic, with a switch with a float in the tank.

Another problem we solved was the showers: we only had cold showers and when the boys came home in the winter after dark after a hockey match, it was not nice to take a cold shower. So a 44-gallon drum was converted with a copper [large copper bowl for washing] inside to make a hot water system. In the copper full with water was a copper tube, coiled around. After we had the water boiling it was lovely to take a shower.

The toilets also were something out of the box. Everything was hessian. The 'poep' box was a place for 10 at a time; holes with lids and a dividing beam for back to back. Nobody sat on it. We all jumped up as a kangaroo and squatted down. What I could not understand at first was why the 'Indian' boys always took a bottle of water, but once seen I never forgot their idea of toilet paper. Also one weekend it had been raining very heavily and a lot of water had run from the slope; it had weakened the base of the 'box' and one of our boys, running in the rain to the toilet, hopped on the box and the box came tumbling down and there he stood up to his knees in the chocolate.

On Christmas Eve in 1945 Vaandrig - or he could have been a 2nd Lt by then - Haarmans was at the guard barracks around 6 o'clock, talking to the boys. When he came outside his jeep was gone - he was raving mad! But about 9 o'clock you could see the headlamps of the jeep coming back through the trees. Haarmans stood in his jungle boots, his legs wide apart, next to the barrack and slowly the jeep approached him, the windscreen of the jeep down resting on the bonnet. The driver stopped in front of the Vaandrig, the bumper bar touching the bootlaces of his jungle boots. 'Why did you take my jeep and where have you been' Haarmans asked. 'I took it Vaandrig because I wanted to go to town to wish some very good friends of me a Merry Xmas'. Vaandrig: 'I don't agree with this, what would have happened if more boys would have liked to go to town'. And the driver answered: 'Oh Vaandrig if I had known more boys were interested I would have taken the camp bus.' Vaandrig Haarmans smiled and walked away. He made a lot of friends that night.

The relationship with the Casino people was very good. A lot of us went to the Presbyterian Church and fellowship (youth club) and they looked after us very well.

We also played sports and one funny story comes to mind:

Lismore athletics rang the camp to ask if some of the boys would be interested in their sports carnival. Various boys were interested (Ivits, Minderhout and others) and forms were forwarded to be filled in for the purpose of taking part. One of the questions confused the boys: 'what was your handicap over the last years?' The answers were: four years of war, not enough to eat etc. The 'Northern Star' newspapers wrote about this under the headline 'Dutchmen Confused.'





Going home

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of August 1946 we left the camp, about 50 of us, to go back to Holland to start training to become Aircrew.

We were trucked to Brisbane and left with the *Volendam* which had a lot of 'repats' from Indonesian Concentration Camps on board [Dutch citizens held by the Japanese during the war]. We also went to Sydney, Melbourne and Fremantle to pick up more of them. When we left Melbourne we saw one of our boys, who went AWOL in Casino, on the harbour wharf waving us goodbye.

We went via the Suez Canal and on 22.9.46 I woke up in the Suez Canal on my 26th birthday. We arrived in Rotterdam on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. October 1946.

After a holiday we went back on 7 Nov. 46 to air base Ypenburg for a medical examination. Several boys were unfit and I passed but asked to be transferred to ground crew stationed in Ypenburg, as my parents' home was bombed in 1945 and I could not go home anyway.

On 9.7.47 I and nine other LSK boys who wanted to be demobbed in Australia and stay there, left with the *Nieuw Holland* [Dutch troop ship] to go to Batavia [Jakarta].

In Batavia we met Capt. Sleeboom. We spent four days in Meester Cornelis [camp] and then a Dutch Air Force plane with Australian crew flew us via Darwin to Brisbane and from there we went by train to Sydney where I got my discharge from the LSK on the 20.8.1947.

PS. A few weeks after we left Casino, the Australian MP moved the Indonesian prisoners by train to Brisbane. And the Dutch boys still in the camp at the time left the camp and went to load ships.





**Jo van Dijk (Dyk)**

**THE VOLUNTEERS**

EINDHOVEN.

4<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 1945 TO 15<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 1945

WOLVERHAMPTON.

16<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 1945 TO 29<sup>TH</sup> MAY 1945

It was Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> April 1945, and five days after my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday that we left, 20 men from our war-torn frontline hometown Nijmegen for a military camp at Eindhoven.

After medical examinations, political questioning, written and oral exercises, I became enlisted in the Dutch Air Force, ground personnel, trainee radio mechanic/communication technician.

SLD.OVW-LSK J.C. van Dijk. (Private War Volunteer-Air Force)

Register number 02130193

We all felt proud in our new uniforms, sorry for the boys who were sent home, we were ready to do our part and conquer the world.

We left Eindhoven 14<sup>th</sup> April 1945 by truck, 20 men went to Oostende, Belgium and the next day by ship to England. Arriving at Wolverhampton on the 16<sup>th</sup> April 1945.

Our destination was Australia and Wolverhampton was our transit camp. While there on the 4<sup>th</sup> May 1945, we received news regarding the liberation of the Netherlands from German occupation. Jubilation in our camp flowed over to wild parties. Four days later V-Day, the war with Germany officially declared *as over*.

For two days there were no camp duties and everybody joined the celebration at Wolverhampton, great festivities that lasted for days.

On the same day as V-day 61 boys from our camp left for Australia.

After 6 weeks in Wolverhampton our turn came and 80 of us left on the 29<sup>th</sup> May 1945. Under strict security, not knowing how we would travel, we left in the afternoon arriving in war-damaged Liverpool to board the British transport ship, *S.S. Arundel Castle*.



*S.S. ARUNDEL CASTLE. 29<sup>TH</sup> MAY 1945 TO 7<sup>TH</sup> JULY 1945.*

The *S.S. Arundel Castle*, was a 20,000-ton passenger liner with 5 decks, transformed for wartime into a personnel transport carrier. For defence the ship was carrying anti-aircraft and field guns. We were the first group to arrive on board and our nominated accommodation was located near the water line. This was an area set aside with benches for 80 men to have their meals. The same area above the benches had to be used at night for sleeping in hammocks. Each morning all the hammocks had to be folded and stored in specified locations.

The following morning more than 2,000 Australian and New Zealand ex prisoners of war who were all going home, arrived on board creating a great deal of activity.

That afternoon, even before the new arrivals could settle down our ship left port.

In the harbour was also a Dutch ship the *S.S. Volendam* that left at the same time as we did. As night came our ship travelled on in complete darkness, then with no lights we stopped and waited outside the harbour.

The next morning moving along at full speed, to our surprise on starboard was the *S.S. Volendam*, and in front of our ship were two destroyers. We learned that the *S.S. Volendam* had Canadian Service Personnel on board

The first days we saw nothing but water, we learned how to use our sea legs. The *S.S. Volendam* and the two destroyers had left us during one of the nights and well after that we passed an island of the West Indies. Two more pleasant days in the Caribbean Sea, then as high mountains became visible we arrived safe and well at Colon, Panama.

Fortunately we were allowed to go on shore, and it was wonderful to see palm trees, also to touch and eat bananas we hadn't seen for five years during the war.



Wellington, musical welcome

On the 15<sup>th</sup> June 1945 we went through the Panama Canal. It took all day, including waiting time to move through the floodgates, lakes and the narrow sections of the canal, having rocks going up on both sides of the ship. It was splendid to see it all.

Waking up the next day, we were again surrounded by water – the Pacific Ocean.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> June 1945, during the night, we crossed the Equator. We received a small remembrance token the next day. No festivities, the ship, after leaving Panama was again in full darkness: we were still at war with the Japanese. We passed the International Date Line and we went from Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> July 1945, to Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1945.

Separate stories can be told about life saver instructions should our ship sink, meals on board, insufficient drinking water, climatic and weather conditions with waves over the front deck, no entertainment except on the back deck, during daytime, there were all types of gambling games.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1945, we reached New Zealand. It was very impressive to see the



mountains of the North Island. Entering Wellington Harbour, a military band was playing. There were film crews, photographers and lots of excitement for the New Zealanders who were coming home.

They let us go on shore. We received twelve shillings and six pence N.Z. money. Coming from war torn Europe it was great to see the shops where everything was available and plentiful. After eating nuts (not seen for five years) we tried the beautiful Wellington cakes with whipped cream-impossible to stop eating. People were so friendly and helpful – even a couple of young ladies brought us back to the ship!

The next morning we left the harbour. Soon the ship was between the North and South Islands. Snow was visible on the mountains.

Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> July 1945, hooray! There was Australia! It was still dark when we saw long lines of lights onshore from the city of Sydney. The sun came up. Around 8 o'clock we entered the harbour. War ships everywhere. Slowly moving through the harbour we finished up in an area called Neutral Bay. The Australian Service Personnel left the ship immediately in small ferries and disappeared somewhere in the big harbour.

A Lieutenant Colonel of the Dutch Air Force and the Dutch Consul General arrived on board and welcomed us to Australia. All very good and exciting especially later, when from the deck we saw those officials flying over in a B25 Mitchell bomber with the Dutch red white and blue emblem. Late in the afternoon we went onshore at Circular Quay. Double-decker buses took us to Central Railway Station. After buying refreshments the 80 of us finished up on the steam train to Casino. It was dark outside and we went to sleep as best we could.

Early the next morning, looking out the windows, we were excited to see for the first time an Australian landscape, and uncultivated land areas with dead trees.

The train stopped at 9 o'clock at a little station to stretch our legs and give us twenty minutes for breakfast. Bacon and eggs and cornflakes. Unfortunately we didn't know cornflakes. Do you consume it dry? Looking around you mix it with milk. But how much milk? How much sugar? We went back to the train still hungry.

#### *CASINO. (FIRST STAY) 8<sup>TH</sup> JULY 1945 TO 25 JULY 1945*

We reached Casino at 1 o'clock. The boys from our previous transport last seen at Wolverhampton, were waiting for us. Trucks took us from the station to Victory Camp. There were no differences between the area set aside for our camp and the surrounding countryside. It was like Wild West country.

Our accommodation was in tents with field stretchers, five blankets and a mosquito net. Many hundreds of other military personnel located at the campsite came from the Dutch East Indies and a smaller group came from the West Indies and Surinam. The language used was Dutch and Malaysian.

Our stay at Victory Camp was for infantry training and we were willing to learn everything as quickly as possible so that we could move on to our air force training. The Sergeant said that he had never had a group before which had learned all the requirements so quickly.

In our spare time we had to do our washing. You boil it on a wood fire outside your tent. Or you could go to Casino on the private bus for one shilling, go to the pictures, or you just look around all dressed up, shirt and tie, and have a milkshake.

Two days before leaving for Melbourne we went on a 30 km march, complete with full military pack. It was a group of many hundreds, including Javanese soldiers. Our



perspiration started soon after leaving and we no longer looked at our heavy rifles as friends. Possibly the thought of the officer in charge was *you people going for your air force training, remember the infantry.*

We left Casino on the 25<sup>th</sup> July 1945, by train for Melbourne total 30 men – Air Force training ground personnel. Our future flying personnel stayed behind at Casino and we felt sorry about the split up.

On the way to Melbourne we arrived in the morning at Sydney while the train for Melbourne was leaving late in the afternoon, giving us time to explore the city.

At Albury we had to change trains. An argument started that the railway gauge on one side of the platform was different to that on the other side. A bet followed. One of the boys climbed down the platform on both sides and found that there was a difference, more or less 15 to 25 cm.

#### MELBOURNE 27<sup>TH</sup> JULY 1945 TO 8<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 1945.

Arrived at Melbourne, our place of stay and also our official address was: No. 2 Wing. No.1 Engineering School. RAAF Showground, ASCOT VALE.

The location was behind the Ascot Vale racecourse and by tram twenty minutes from Melbourne city centre.

The camp area held a good canteen; separate writing areas and a library with technical books, magazines, etc.

After more Dutch air force personnel arrived at our campsite, we finished up with approximately 200 men. Some came from a Dutch military camp located at Bacchus Marsh.

We had to adjust to the RAAF camp requirements, wake up at 6 o'clock each morning, line up and the parade that followed was completely new to the Australians. The off duty ones even came along to have a look at how we went from rows of two along side each other to rows of four and eight.

While we were at Melbourne I had my first opportunity to go flying. With one of the other future airmen we went to the airport, which was under the control of the RAAF. We reported to the officer in charge, explained what we would like and were surprised that in less than one hour we were in the sky over Melbourne. It was magnificent.

On Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> August 1945 the war in the Pacific ended. For 48 hours there were no duties. We all went to the city, meeting never ending smiling people and celebrations everywhere.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> August a total of 20,000 military personnel marched through Melbourne as part of the celebrations. We too were in the procession and a newspaper recorded that the contingent and the three platoons of Dutch airmen marched "like Potsdam drill Sergeants, rarely seen in Australia before".

While at the Engineering School Dutch army officers came along with a proposal for us to sign a contract for five years military service. Lots of discussion followed, for and against, advantage and disadvantage. What was the future work situation in Holland and the Dutch East Indies? I decided not to sign. Only 60 of the 200 men signed to stay in the military forces.

The end of the global war brought a complete change for us. The RAAF camp and the engineering school were closing down and we had to go, interrupting our training. The final day came early in September, and leaving some of our new friends behind, we went back by train to Casino.



CASINO (SECOND STAY) 10<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 1945 TO 9<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 1946.

The war had been finished for one month in the Pacific and there was talk that we would be the first troops to move to the Dutch East Indies.

At one stage all leave was cancelled and we were ready to move, complete with loaded trucks, destination South Celebes, nominated place Makassar. I was enlisted as a Telegrapher. Overnight our departure was *off* because of shipping difficulties.

Not long after that during October 1945, problems started with our Dutch East Indies Army members. The Javanese, the biggest proportion of our troops in Casino, no longer showed any cooperation. With everybody's help we constructed a security area surrounded by hundreds of rolls of barbed wire, and confined the Javanese military personnel inside this enclosure. At first we started with a few hundred Javanese, but later finished up with 580, all locked up.

Our situation changed. Somebody had to guard these men 24 hours a day. We started our guard duties with three days on and three days off. If you were on duty in the morning you had the afternoon off and vice versa.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1945, a colonel of the Dutch army arrived at our camp. He explained to us the political and military situation regarding the Dutch East Indies at that time. He was full of praise about our understanding and the common sense we had used handling our case with the internees (whom we called "prisoners"). He also praised our ability to prevent unnecessary conflict outside the camp with certain members of the Australian community and the way we showed our patriotic duty. That was all very nice and flattering but how long was the guard duty to last? The colonel expected at least three months.

Our accommodation was in tents, four men to each tent. Each of us had his own story. The story of each of the other three persons in the tent I shared was as follows.

Person A: 24 years old, originally from Utrecht. In 1942 sent from Holland to work in Germany, escaped by swimming the river Rhine to Switzerland. Completed University at Basel. Went to France after its liberation. Utrecht was still in German hands. Went to Wolverhampton, England and joined the Air force.

Person B: 25 years old from Zeeland. Completed Merchant Navy schooling as Telegraph Operator. For two years was in the partisan resistance movement in Holland and in contact with England by wireless Morse code.

Person C: 19 years old from s'Hetogenbosch, completed HBS. He was easy going. He had a lot of rubbish under his bed, which we complained about. He spent most of his time in Casino where he showed affection for the daughter of the local Mayor.

Christmas 1945, I was lucky not to be on guard duty. On Christmas morning four of us went to the Presbyterian Church service at Casino and after the service were invited by an Australian family to have Christmas dinner with them, a very pleasant occasion. With the change from the Old to the New Year we "tried out" our firearms, against all rules and regulations. For New Year's Dinner we expected chicken but unfortunately they got lost in the kitchen and never reached our table.

In February 1946, our accommodation changed from tents to sheet metal barracks. We also shifted to a new location inside Victory Camp. We finished up with 15 men in our barracks.

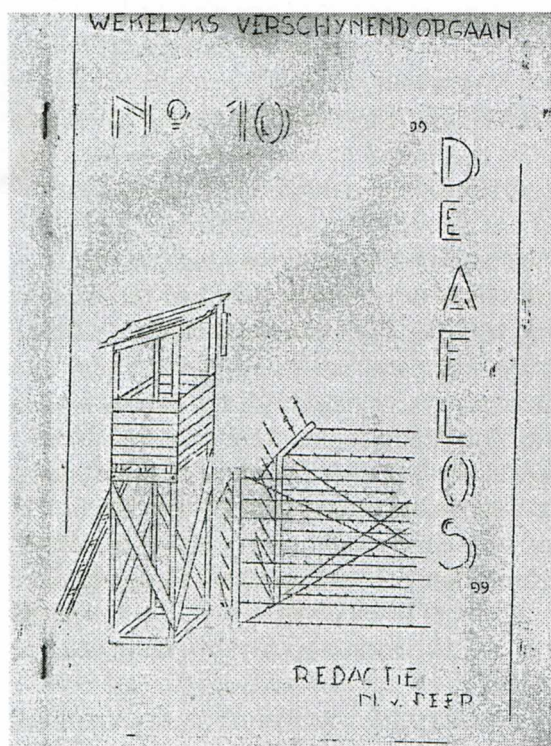
While on guard duty during the daytime, if the temperature was not too hot, you had an opportunity to catch up with your correspondence. On duty during the night, the big wood campfire was an attraction for warming up and listening to all the *tall strong* stories from everyone. Between stories you could fry your eggs, not just two, but many more, by having your frying pan on the ground near the fire. If on duty on



the watchtowers you observed the change of weather conditions, thunderstorms, amazing lightning during the night, or you saw the sun coming up or going down.

On 17<sup>th</sup> April 1946, prisoners had been locked up for six months and there was trouble. They refused to follow orders and ignored alarm instructions. Commotion followed. Warning shots were fired to stop the turbulence. There was one fatal casualty and one wounded. After this upheaval there was no further problem and the prisoners followed all instructions.

Of all the camp activities, one of the most successful was our hockey team. It played competition sport against Australian teams, mainly in Lismore. Also, one of our boys boxed in Lismore and went from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> classification. Sadly for us there were no Australian soccer teams around Casino or Lismore to play against. Beside our sporting activities a group of keen volunteers started a camp magazine, *De Aflos* (*The Relief*). [Change of guard.]



*De Aflos* camp magazine

plus an additional truck for potential breakdowns and repairs. They went to Brisbane, then by ship, *S.S. Volendam* to Holland.

More barbed wire as double fencing was placed around the prisoners' campsite and our armament became heavier. We were left behind with 60 men to guard 580 prisoners.

Queen Wilhelmina's birthday, 31<sup>st</sup> August, happened with no festivities, there not being enough personnel. Even on this special day it was difficult to find enough men for the morning flag parade, to raise our colours on the flagpole with military respect.

September 1946, we had inside our prison camp internal problems. One prisoner was seriously injured with multiple stab wounds, some twelve knife cuts. Days later another prisoner was found dead, hanging inside one of the tents. An investigation showed he didn't hang himself, but was murdered. We had to round up thirteen men, known ringleaders, for further inquiries but how to remove those from 580 prisoners as they all look alike? After selecting the persons there was trouble, consequently we

On the 10<sup>th</sup> June 1946, we celebrated the end of the war in Europe one year before. A number of our personnel went to Sydney for the Victory March, which I missed because of guard duty.

On Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> July 1946, a tragic accident happened to one of our men. At Casino airport while placing blocks in front of the wheels of a private aircraft, he was seriously injured by the propeller and passed away two hours later in the Memorial Hospital in Casino.

In August 1946, after waiting many weeks, a selected group of 50 flying personnel departed our camp for training in Holland. No ground training personnel were included. Certain items were in short supply in Holland as a consequence of the post-war problems. All personnel going home bought those commodities and three trucks were filled with boxes, suitcases, bags etc. A total of five trucks were needed for transport,



finished up with one fatally wounded and two prisoners injured. The selected prisoners were placed under separate guard outside the prison camp. At a later date the thirteen men were transported to the Dutch East Indies. The story we learned later was that during the night they were moved under guard to an airfield 60 miles from Casino where a Dutch military plane was waiting.

On the 2nd November 1946, under control of the Australian Military Police, 230 prisoners went from our camp to Brisbane for transport to the Dutch East Indies. All went well and there were no problems and no difficulties with the prisoners who stayed behind.

Around this time we got big news: with 30 men I was leaving Casino, destination Sydney for loading ships. We really were looking forward to the change. The 20 to 30 men staying behind would be looking after the 330 prisoners. Instead of 12 men on guard duty, there will be only 6. Of the prison camp four guard towers, one on each corner, only two of those would be manned, the ones opposite (diagonally) each other.

#### LOADING SHIPS.

*SYDNEY, BRISBANE, MELBOURNE. 13 OCT 1946 TO 4 JUNE 1947.*

The Australian Maritime Union put a ban on loading any ship bound for the Dutch East Indies.

On the 13th October 1946, we started in Sydney loading our first ship, Australian registered and hired by the Dutch Government. We were 52 men, all from the Dutch Air Force, 30 from Casino and those remaining from airfields around Australia where they served as mechanics.

To reduce loading time we worked with three groups, two during daytime, between 8 am to 5 o'clock and one group from 6 pm to 12 o'clock midnight. By lot I finished up working the nightshift. All loading equipment was self-contained from the ship except that we used hired forklift trucks on the wharf and inside the ship cargo area.

It was amazing how quickly we learned how to use the machinery on the ship, hoist equipment, using rope netting or slings for lifting items from the wharf to inside the ship.

None of us had any previous experience but we all worked as a team, took safety first and it all worked out well.

On our first ship we loaded boxes and boxes with milk powder, jam, emergency rations, cigarettes, spirits, bales of linen, train spare parts and 800 crates with new motorbikes.

Between 13th October 1946 and the 4th June 1947, for eight- months, we loaded different vessels and stayed at the following places:

Sydney	from 13 October 1946	to December 1946
Brisbane	December 1946	January 1947
Sydney	January 1947	February 1947
Brisbane	February 1947	March 1947
Melbourne	March 1947	4 June 1947

Besides the Australian registered ships we also loaded the Dutch ships the *M.S. Tabinta* and the *M.S. Tjibezar*. After the war shipping was in short supply and we also finished up loading in Sydney a big "Liberty" landing craft. After it left the harbour, near Newcastle it lost the front doors and came back to Sydney with one metre of water inside the cargo area.



All goods were for the Dutch East Indies. Besides materials listed before, we also loaded clothing, oilrig-drilling equipment, 40 to 50 training aircraft, the fuselage, wings and engines were all separate items. From Brisbane we loaded a number of live rabbits complete with rabbit food. Our biggest single items, also by weight, we handled were our motorcars and army trucks.

If practical we stayed and had our meals on board the ships. When the ship left, our accommodation was at different places. At Brisbane we had our own campsite at New Farm Park, approximately 20 minutes by army bus from the wharf site. For our work, while loading ships, we received extra payment. The compensation was very welcome but we must have saved the Dutch Government considerable amount of expense. Normally we didn't work on the Sundays but the occasion came along in Melbourne, we were holding up our ship also at considerable expense. The Army captain called us together, and explained the situation. They were waiting urgently at the Dutch Indies for our goods, our country needed us, we should show our patriotic duty and yes, we were working that Sunday.

While off duty, after work and also if waiting for the next ship to be loaded, we had an opportunity to see, learn, explore and also very important meet the people of each city and all those attractive Australian ladies. There was not sufficient time for us to do everything. At Brisbane we went on the weekends by army bus to Surfers Paradise. At Sydney and Melbourne there were so many attractions and so many things to visit.

Discussions took place on what to do after army life. News regarding the work situation in Holland, that we learned from our correspondence, was not convincing, not secure, also the Netherlands suffered from postwar difficulties. Several, especially with our experience of the last eight months, wanted to stay behind and have their discharge in Australia.

While in Melbourne, on the 28th May 1947, we received official news that the next week 4th June, we would go to Brisbane by train, for our flight to Batavia (Jakarta). We would leave with 10 men and would be replaced with 24 new personnel from the Dutch East Indies.

#### *BATAVIA. 8 JUNE 1947 TO 10 JULY 1947.*

We arrived in Brisbane on the 7th June 1947, which was our last full day in Australia. At lunchtime our group went to a Chinese restaurant and we all had a good meal.

The next day we had to wake up at 3.30 in the morning and after arriving at the airport our Dutch Air Force plane, a DC 3, with an Australian crew, left Brisbane while still dark.

The middle of the fuselage was completely filled up with different types of machinery while we were seated along each side facing the machinery, on webbing type seats. The noise of the engines made it impossible to have a conversation while in the air or you had to shout.

On the way to Darwin we made several stops. Most of them looked like deserted airstrips at which the plane could refill aviation fuel for the next step. The aviation fuel was supplied by hand pump out of 44 gallon drums standing on the back of a utility car. At our first stop, it was still early in the morning; we had breakfast, large pieces of bacon and 3 eggs, which was waiting for us inside an open sided structure, at the perimeter of the airfield. Back in the air and after more stops, at a distance we passed Ayers Rock (Uluru) and we reached Darwin by darkness.



The next morning by daylight we left Darwin and went to Timor. With not many passengers on board we had an opportunity to spend time in the cockpit with the pilot while flying over beautiful peaceful looking islands between Timor and Bali. While landing in Denpasar, Bali, flying low we noticed a military guard, with an automatic rifle, standing at the beginning of the airfield. After all that time since we left Europe we were back in the war zone. Our next stop after that was Surabaya, Java; we were not allowed to leave the plane. Our stop was only to refuel, and we went off again to land in Batavia (Jakarta) late in the afternoon.

At Batavia, transport took us from the airport to our transit camp at "Meester Cornelis". Batavia was a different world to that we had come from. From the airport to our camp we saw along the street hundreds of local people trying to sell their merchandise from outside stalls or from the footpath. It was a very busy place with Dutch military personnel everywhere.

After we settled in, we quickly learned where to go and what not to do. In the evenings and night we visited different military canteens where local bands were playing. Drinks were expensive. At certain places and days even at set times, fights would start, bottles would fly. The military police were waiting for it, and would take over and look after the "happy" intoxicated ones.



**Baboe, or maid servant**

In Australia we used dry-cleaners for our uniforms and for the rest of our clothing we did our own washing. It was different this time. Walking around were a number of "baboes" maidservants, they look after your clothing, clean your shoes and wash your dishes after your meal but first they ate what was left over (it may have been their only meal for the day). From time to time you handed something to them and they were happy. Also, they liked cigarettes. Everybody smoked, from small children to old people.

Our stay in Batavia was to organise our paperwork and to wait for transport to the Netherlands. At regular intervals we had to visit the military head office, located in one of the old Dutch colonial buildings. That way we learned what was going on and the latest news regarding transport.

One day, one of our men came to our sleeping quarters and told us that we should report at the head office, the officer wanted to see us. The reason being we were promoted to corporal. We were laughing and thought he was telling tales to send us there for nothing and no one took it seriously. The next day we were listed to go down there regarding our transport and we learned that all of us, the 10 that came from Australia, were promoted. Some of us rejected the promotion, because we never received our promised air force training. Further questioning indicated that we could wear wings on our uniform, with our infantry training and two year service, as long as the wings showed a sword. "The airborne infantry?" Not many showed much interest, they all wanted to go home.



Being in the army we could exchange our currency, Australian pounds and our East Indies money for Dutch guildens [guilders] at the official exchange rate. The money exchange street vendor's rate at Batavia was different to the official rate. Nobody wanted East Indies money they where after American dollars, English or Australian pounds. We did very well exchanging our Australian currency with the street vendors for East Indies money which after that we changed to Dutch guildens at the official rate.

One evening, we were invited for drinks by our captain from Casino [Sleeboom], who was also in Batavia. It was a pleasant occasion. He pointed out that if we wanted to remain in the army, we should extend our stay in Batavia for at least three months, which he was doing. Another reason was to be recognised as having served in the East Indies and being part of the present police action. We asked what about Casino? Australia did not have the same recognition regarding military service, (by the Dutch Government) as one had if one had done military service in the East. None of us wanted to stay in the army and all of us wanted to go back to Holland, as soon as possible.

We received news that we would leave on the next available ship, the *M.S. Kota Inten* on the 10th July 1947.

*M.S. KOTA INTEN                      10 JULY 1947 TO 7 AUGUST 1947.*  
*HOLLAND-DISCHARGE    7 AUGUST 1947 TO 5 OCTOBER 1947.*

From our camp we went to the harbour side, located outside Batavia. While aboard, looking down, we saw loading the ship, hundreds of Javanese men running around. Doing the work we did before in Australia but they were with many more people. On one side was a middle aged person, fully dressed, a "belanda" Caucasian, the overseer holding a long whip. The workers didn't take any notice of him but no wonder they didn't like us!

The ship left the wharf and there was plenty of daylight left to go through the Sunda Strait between Java and Sumatra. It looked all very peaceful, very pleasant and beautiful. Suddenly I noticed that they had removed covers, on both sides of the ship, from some gun towers and there were heavy machine-guns in place although they were not manned. Fortunately there was no trouble. We passed Krakatau and were in the Indian Ocean.

Very soon we learned that a group of us were the only healthy persons on board and that the ship was returning to Holland with sick and wounded military patients. We never learned exactly what was going on, or how many patients were on board. Also there were mothers on board with children, some of those only babies, and again we never met those people. Luckily belonging to the healthy group, we were called on to be on regular duty to peel potatoes, being on a Dutch ship they were all really good potato eaters. Big containers full and somebody had to clean those.

In the evening the Southern Cross was clearly visible in the sky but shifting closer and closer to the horizon. We crossed the equator on the 25<sup>th</sup> July 1947, but there were no festivities. On our first voyage to Australia the evenings and nights were in complete darkness but this time all the lights were on.

I am not sure how many, but at least one of the military patients on board the ship passed away while we were at sea. The 500 year old traditional custom was followed, the burial at sea. On our ship it was held at sunrise, as early as possible while everyone was still asleep and in that way not aware of the event. Words were spoken



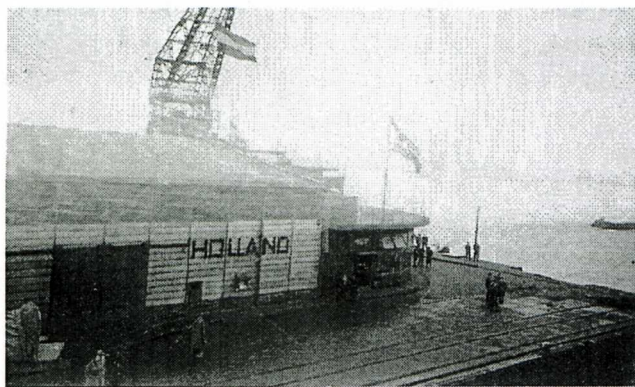
by the religious representative. The casket was covered by the Dutch flag which was removed at the moment the casket was lowered into the sea.

One of the men, not from our section, smuggled at Batavia a small live monkey aboard against all rules and regulations. His excuse was that it was his pet while serving in Java and he wanted to take it home. The poor monkey, 25 to 30 cm high when seated, would not always be quiet during the night. The screeching noises against the creaking noises of the ship woke everybody but fortunately it settled down after a while and nobody wanted to complain and report the nuisance, no one wanted to know anyway.

We reached Suez. Going through the lakes and Suez Canal was a welcome change and very interesting. Ships passing and going in the opposite directions were so close that everything was clearly visible. One of these was a pleasure craft, nicely fitted out complete with swimming pool and surrounded by nice ladies. We nearly wanted to jump ship but the distance was too much. Our ship looked worn out. It still had all the emergency safety equipment from the war years on deck and it showed fatigue but it was going in the right direction. At Port Said we received a welcome from all the locals, who wanted to sell their goods. Off we went again and this time we were in the Mediterranean Sea.

One of our men was treasuring the few gramophone records he had collected and wanted to share the music with everybody. The public address system sound quality was not too good but he got permission one afternoon and equipment was available, to play his records. The music only lasted seven minutes and stopped abruptly because one of the mothers complained that the children woke up and couldn't sleep.

We passed the Rock of Gibraltar, then the White Cliffs of Dover and yes we had been around the world!



**Holland in the fog**

The low country appeared and after passing the "Hoek van Holland" we arrived at Rotterdam on the 7<sup>th</sup> August 1947. On our arrival we received a letter from HRH. Prins Bernhard of the Netherlands to welcome us back home in our fatherland.

Fortunately for us it was summer and the weather was good. After we left our ship with our hand luggage we had to wait at a nominated place inside a storage area like a hangar.

Opposite our waiting area, with a walkway in between, was a group, of female Dutch sailors in uniform. One of the tall ones was very attractive. There was no eye contact but if it had been in Australia we would have gone over to introduce ourselves. It was very strange. We were in Holland and straight away our behaviour changed. Why the difference? It was as if we were in a foreign country, coming straight from our ship it was a different world, not our own.

Transport took us the same day to our hometown and place of living, in my case Nijmegen. Coming home the whole family was waiting, including aunties and uncles. It was good to be home but everything was tiny, comparatively reduced in size from what it was in my memory, the home where I was born.



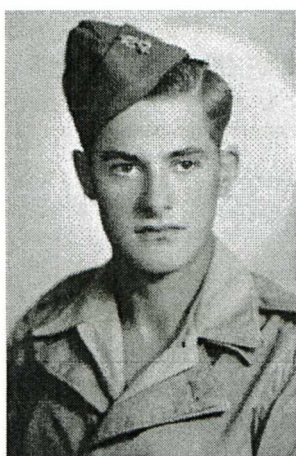
It took a while to settle in and even though it was summer, there was no running around inside the house or outside in my "Bonds" singlet. Soon after that my pushbike was ready, complete with new tyres from Australia and I was mobile again.

Where possible I took every opportunity to learn or to gain information available to us from the military services and from the Government on what could be used in our civilian life.

Our transit camp was at Woerden near Utrecht.

I received my discharge as OVW [War Volunteer] and from the army on the 5<sup>th</sup> October 1947.





### **Gijs Eikelenboom**

In March 1945 I enlisted as a war volunteer for the air force; towards the end of April I was called up for a medical examination and on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May I became a member of the LSK.

I was given an RAAF uniform [most recruits received the RAAF uniform in England before sailing to Australia] and was told that I would be trained in Australia as an aircraft mechanic and would be a member of the ground crew. Quite a few of us, including me, were at that stage puzzled as to why we would be sent to Australia for training.

We were first accommodated in the recruiting centre in the Rechtestraat in Eindhoven, which was housed in two former clothing/department stores.

There we had our medicals and aptitude tests and we were also interrogated in order to find out whether we had been politically 'correct' during the German occupation.

After signing a service contract I was now a member of the Dutch Air Force.

#### \*Note

'There was an agreement with the Australian Government that 1000 ground crew were to be trained by the RAAF in Australia.

Lt.Col G.J. Fiedeldij, then head of Dept. C of the NEI dept. of war had decided that it was advisable to bring the total number of air force personnel to 3600 of which 2300 were to be recruited in the liberated part of Holland and would be trained in Australia.'

As mentioned before we were given our dark blue RAAF uniform. We were also taught the hierarchy in the air force. As a future ground crew member I was interviewed by the Trade Test Board where it was decided that I would become an aircraft mechanic with the rank of 3-AC2.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 1945 we were moved from Eindhoven to Oostende in Belgium and on the 15<sup>th</sup> of that month we were shipped to England, where we were housed in the army camp where the 'Princess Irene Brigade' had been formed. It was called Wrottesley Park Camp and was on Tettenhall Road in the village of Coshall near Wolverhampton.



Naam van den houder: (Full name) <b>BIKSELNBOOM</b>			PERSOONSBESCHRIJVING (Description)		
Kwiteit rank: <b>LUNA3-AC2</b>			Lengte: 1 M 72 c.M. (5 Ft. 8 Inch) (Height)		
Dienstnummer: (Official number) <b>18500506</b>			Bouw: (Build) <b>NORMAL</b>		
Gehoorde datum: (Date of Birth) <b>10 FEB. 1925</b>			Kleur ogen: <b>BRUIN</b> (BROWN) (Colour of eyes)		
			Haarkleur: <b>BLOND</b> (FAIR) (Colour of hair)		

BEVORDERINGEN (Changes of rank)		
Datum (Date)	Rang (Rank)	Parasit. cdt. (Initials C.O.)

Handtekening van den houder: (Signature of holder) 	Handtekening Director P.M. (Signature Director Netherl. Air Force)
Dagtekening stempel: (Issuing office stamp) <b>13 MAY 1945</b>	SECURITY OFFICER S.H.

We were put up in barracks and were given information about the tropics and also received some basic military training. We used to sing enthusiastically while marching through the surrounding villages. And finally we were given injections against various diseases and some brave soldiers actually fainted after receiving these. Particularly the tetanus and cholera shots made me very sick and lying on my straw mattress on the stretcher that was my bed, I felt very uncomfortable to say the least.

### ID of young recruit

In the evening of 27.5.1945 we travelled by train to Glasgow in Scotland where we boarded the troopship *Orontes* the next day. On this ship there were also many Australian and New Zealand soldiers who were going home now that the war with Germany had ended. The holds were more than full so that sleeping there in hammocks was not very comfortable. It was very warm down there and also rather smelly with so many people crammed together. In the Gulf of Biscay quite a few of us became seasick and as a result we were living in a kind of pig sty!

As soon as we were in the Mediterranean I took my hammock up to the deck and slept there in the fresh air. But at six in the morning one had to make sure to have left the deck as the cleaners came to hose them down – the cleaner used to call ‘waki waki, get up it is six o’clock’ and if you didn’t make yourself scarce you ran the risk of being hosed off the deck, together with your hammock.

The *Orontes* was the first troopship after Germany surrendered that sailed to Australia via the Suez Canal. This ship sailed pretty fast and was therefore capable of staying ahead of any Japanese submarines that could still be in the area.

As soon as we sailed into the Indian Ocean the ship was totally blacked out at night and as a result one sometimes tripped over a pair of legs that belonged to a person also sleeping on deck, which could be a member of the Women’s Corps, who also sailed on this ship.

After about six weeks we docked in Fremantle WA. Some of the Australians disembarked here and we got shore leave until midnight.

That was really something! I have never eaten so many bananas and oranges as I ate then – that type of fruit and such abundance had been unavailable to us for the last five years. In the afternoon I joined Jac Freijsen and Jan van den Eijnden to take the train to Perth. And what a beautiful city we found it to be! In the evening we visited a dance hall with some local girls we had met and did we Dutchies get a fantastic reception there! We felt as though we had descended from heaven. Towards the end of the evening we had to tear ourselves away to be able to get back on board on time.

The following morning we continued our trip and after 7 weeks at sea we arrived in Sydney on 23.7.1945 and moored at Woolloomooloo (aboriginal for cemetery). [‘Place of plenty’ is these days seen as the correct translation.]



The next day we left the ship and were put on a train to Bacchus Marsh in Victoria. We arrived there in the middle of the night and by this time were rather hungry. The Javanese cooks were waiting with an Indonesian meal, which consisted of white rice, a yellow sauce, meat, some



Woolloomooloo as it is in 2007

small green fruits and sambal. The very first

spoonful sort of set me on fire and with an unprintable exclamation I threw the food into the garbage bin. I was no longer hungry.

We were put up in barracks, the outer walls of which were only half-high so that the top half was open to the elements. During the night it was very cold (winter) – actually it was close to freezing and in the morning we had to wash and shave outside with cold water.

We were again doing elementary military training like marching. Lt. Poublon was at this camp – later in Holland he was promoted to a high military rank.

Early August we left for Melbourne and were stationed in number one engineering school at Ascot Vale to receive technical education. I had to learn to level-file a piece of heavy metal and got lessons in technical English. That was a real problem because most of us, including me, only knew a few words in that language.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of August Japan capitulated and we took part in the 'Victory March' through Melbourne city centre. The Australians were impressed with our display of discipline. We arrived in Bourke Street marching in rows of four abreast and following a command from Poublon we changed from four to eight abreast and we marched in typical KNIL style, which was different from what most onlookers were used to.

Early September we had to assemble in a large hall where we were told that our training program was about to be changed. Everyone was supposed to sign a new contract to become part of the KNIL for five years.

This we refused to do; we considered this a breach of contract, since we had already signed a contract when we enlisted. In our case this had meant that we were to be trained for a variety of jobs as air force ground crew. The Dutch Government in other words was not honouring its commitments and there was a complete revolt by our group of LSK people.

A few days later a number of the boys decided to sign up after all. This was followed by a selection and those with a Dutch technical education were allowed to stay on to finish their training, while training for the others was discontinued. The result was that about 30 of us, including myself, could not continue our training and as can be imagined this caused a lot of frustration. One morning we had to do marching drill but we did everything wrong deliberately: at the command of 'left' we would turn right and on 'halt' we kept marching. The sergeant was furious and took us to the gaol where we were put in the two cells which 30 men had to share. Whenever the sergeant



approached we made a lot of noise and abused him, but when an Australian officer came to have a look at the situation we just kept quiet.

The Australian military authorities became involved at this point and demanded that we should be released immediately.

A few days later, in early September, the 30 men were transferred to Victory Camp in Casino, NSW.

\*Note

'As advised by General Major P.Mourer and General N.L.W. van Straten it was decided that all those who were prepared to sign a 5 year contract to serve with the KNIL, would be allowed to finish their training in Australia. All those who were not prepared to sign and who could not be otherwise employed by the Air Force, would be transferred to serve as infantry personnel just like those people who originally were to be trained as air crew.

As far as can be ascertained about 150 men of the ground staff were subsequently trained in either Melbourne, Adelaide, Canberra or Bundaberg. Some other eventually received some training in NEI.'

No attention was paid to us 30 boys who finished up in Casino.

This is a list of boys who I can remember having been transferred from Victoria to Casino:

Teun van Arkel	Jacobs
Jan Avergaart	Kees de Jong
Flip Batenburg	Piet Kersten
Hans van Beek	Jan van de Klooster
Henk Beks	Peter van de Linden
Hans (Jo) van Dijk	Joop Mol
Gijs Eikelenboom	Sjef van Rooi
Jan van de Einden	Ad Schrover
Jac Freijsen	Bill Snoodijk
Blackey (Serve) Hermans	Simon de Vries
Jan Huibregts	Ileke (Bill)Vrolijk
Jan Ivits	Tom van Wees
Theo Jansen	Jan de Wit

In Victory camp we were housed in tents and given a straw mattress and two dirty grey blankets and a mosquito net – we were not given any further attention except by the flies and mosquitoes of which there were millions. I remember that during morning roll call a fly landed on my nose and that I tried to get rid of it by shaking my head. It so happened that the big boss, Lt.Col Breemhouwer, was standing behind me and shouted in rather uncivilised language 'keep your head still when you are standing at attention \*\*\*!!!'

Most of the officers and lower ranks were KNIL professionals and as such they were rather a rough lot. We were really trained as infantry soldiers – we learned how to use our rifle, but also the Bren gun, Austen and even a mortar. Some things got a bit rough, like doing the obstacle course or going on a long march in hot weather.

Some of the officers and lower ranks are worth mentioning because they were reasonable people such as Capt. Sleetboom, Lt. Carlier, 'Adjutant' [NCO] Stroy, Sergeant Tjerkstra, Sergeant Benes and the Surinam Sergeant Snoo.



Especially NCO Stroy was an interesting man – he was a heavy drinker, often 'running one on one' but only at night. He was on the whole very reasonable



Adjutant (NCO) Stroy

In Victory Camp there were also some 500 NEI KNIL military personnel and some others who came from the Dutch West Indies (as they were then called). These people had fled from NEI or had migrated to Australia.

When Soekarno declared the independence of Indonesia many of these people became conscientious objectors and refused to work under Dutch command. So part of the camp was turned into a prison camp where these people were interned behind barbed wire. There were five watch towers where we had to

stand guard with an Austen gun [see picture chapter 6]. It beggars belief that the Australian government ever allowed this to happen.

Guarding those prisoners was unacceptable to us and we protested in any way we could. Without success, however. One morning we refused to show at the roll call and Capt. Sleeboom was so furious he threatened two weeks arrest to all who disobeyed. Due to lack of space this could only be done 3 at a time and indeed some of the boys finished up in gaol, but I had left Casino before it was my turn.

In Casino we mixed with the population and I had met the Reen family who I visited regularly. Mrs. Reen, the mother of Monica and Ronnie, was a lovely lady and I really felt at home there. I often think back with pleasure to that time.

In the meantime there was a more or less regular contact with the Indonesian prisoners. We did not see or treat them as the enemy and even did some bartering through the wire fence! They had nice American uniforms which we liked very much and we had plenty of cigarettes.

Immediately after the Japanese capitulation the American troops left Australia and many goods such as clothing, spirits, even fountain pens but also aeroplanes were left behind and bought by the Dutch for shipment to Indonesia.

Unfortunately the wharf labourers who belonged to a union that was influenced by the communists, were in sympathy with the Indonesians and refused to load the Dutch ships.

Mid 1946 we were asked who would be prepared to load one of these ships in Sydney. Many of us volunteered because we just wanted to get out of Victory Camp – we had more than a gutful of doing guard duties.

After Sydney we were sent to Melbourne to load a ship there and then to Brisbane. We became real wharfies.

From Brisbane we travelled back to Sydney and Melbourne and back again.

While we worked on ships and travelled around, Victory Camp was closed and the prisoners released. We met some of them in Brisbane and they were very pleasant to us – there were no hard feelings



The rest of the Casino boys went back to Holland for further training or went to Indonesia and I stayed behind in Australia with the small group that was left.

This group left Melbourne in July 1947 and went to Brisbane and from there by Dakota to Batavia. Early in August we sailed in the 'Kota Inten' to Holland, where I was demobilised in September 1947.

Looking back at my time in Australia I must say that, in spite of the complaints, disappointments and frustrations I experienced there, it has been a very good period in my life that I would not have missed for anything.

NB.

While in Melbourne when we were cleaning up the offices of the Dutch head quarters, I found the contracts that had been signed by the boys in Melbourne in 1946.

This shows that these contracts had been useless from the beginning.

All these boys have been discharged in 1947.

\*Note – source for this information is:

G.Ward, De Militaire Luchtvaart van het KNIL.





### **Peter Faessen**

At the time WWII ended in the south of the Netherlands, I was living in Blerick in the North of Limburg.

After having been liberated by the Scottish Highlands Division on 29th November 1944, not much of our possessions was left. But worse of course was the number of dead and wounded as a result of this 'liberation'. It was a terrible situation!!

The English troops evacuated us from Blerick via Weert to Eindhoven, where we were given shelter, were cleaned and cleared of lice and otherwise cared for. Here we were informed about the status quo: what had happened to our family and friends.

I was told that my young wife Corrie had not survived the war. At the time of the fighting she had been a patient in Sanatorium Maria Oord in Gennip, which had also suffered damage during the final attack.

My father and brother-in-law, who had been hiding from the Germans in Sevenum during the last few months, joined us now and we were housed in Valkenswaard, where my sister had a baby on 2nd. January – a new life in a free country after all the misery.

In Eindhoven we were told of the possibility to enlist in the forces and fight the Germans. And of course we wanted to do that!

Even though I had not completely recovered from the mortar attack, during which I was only slightly wounded while my brother Johan had been decapitated and several others were killed or seriously wounded, I decided to give it a go and enlist.

It turned out that I was enlisting with the air force and despite the fact that I had suffered serious concussion, I was accepted.

Like the others I was sent to Australia via Wolverhampton in England and I sailed on the *Arundel Castle*, which arrived in Sydney on the 7th of July 1945.

I was in Casino for a short while and was subsequently sent to St. Ives for Jungle Warfare training.

While there I took the opportunity to visit Sydney where I made friends and had a good time.

The war in the Pacific ended while we were in St. Ives and we witnessed the celebrations in Sydney and enjoyed seeing so many happy people.





Peter with Hans Weller in Sydney

A consequence of this sudden ending of the war in the Pacific was, however, that we were all sent back to Casino – the planned pilot training by the RAAF was stopped and most of the group stayed in Casino and became Infantry personnel. When the troubles with the Indonesians started they also became prison guards until they returned to Holland to finally receive their pilot's training.

I, however, together with a group who apparently were deemed to have useful skills for working as technical ground crew, was sent to Bundaberg, where I worked at the airfield until I was sent to Indonesia in May 1946.

In Indonesia I was trained to be a tower operator and in that capacity I was made first a corporal then a sergeant. I worked in Biak, Bandoeng and Padang on Sumatra.

In Biak I was unlucky enough to have a car accident in which I sustained another serious concussion! And I was 'lucky' enough to personally meet President Soekarno during my time in Indonesia. Finally I returned to Holland on the 'Kota Inten', which sailed on 10.7.1947 and I arrived back in Holland on 8.8.47 and left the air force on 4.10.1947.

In the meantime I had found out that my wife Corrie was still alive! A mistake in identifying the victims of the attack in Sevenum had led to her being listed as dead. So after my period in Australia and Indonesia I was finally able to rejoin my wife and in April 2007 we celebrated our 65<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary!

After a break of five years I rejoined the air force in 1952 and restarted my career as tower operator or 'verkeersleidingsassistent' and after having moved through the ranks following many training courses, I finally retired from the air force as Warrant Officer in 1968.

Although I enjoyed my stay in Australia and liked the Australian people very much, I lost contact with that country and my fellow LSKers until I met Han Weller again at a reunion at Soesterberg some years ago.

So when he approached me about writing something about my experiences leading up to my enlisting and about my stay in Australia, I was happy to oblige and I wish to make use of this opportunity to greet my old 'mates' wherever they are.





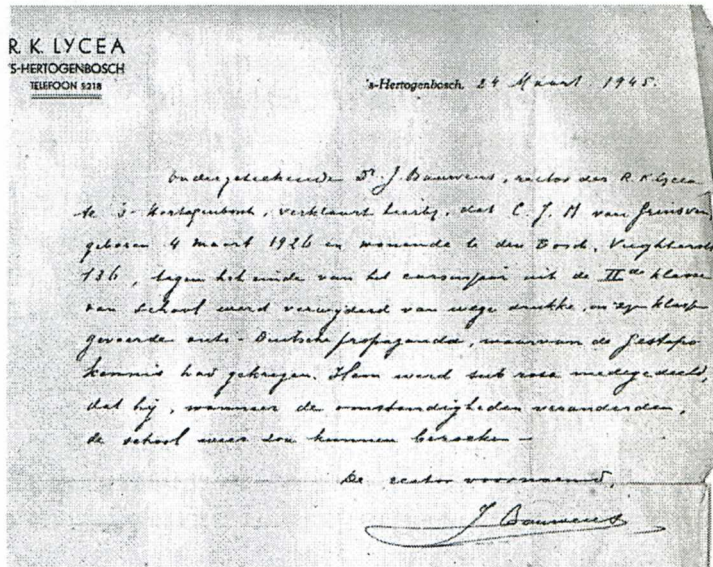
**Kees van Grinsven.**

**Victory Camp Casino History. "Potted History Section."**

Written by Cornelius (Kees) van Grinsven, Leger no 01530707, later changed to: 260304145.

The source of this information is either my memory or personal records which I have kept since my LSK days. For some dates I have referred to John De Wit's diary. s'Hertogenbosch is where I was born, lived and was liberated by the Canadian troops on 26 October 1944 at approx 4.00 pm. The shooting had stopped so we came out of the cellar under our house to see what was happening. From the back window of my Dad's factory we saw a small group of them standing on the Parklaan.

I was a patriotic individual who had been punished for distributing anti German literature by being told to leave the Lyceum in 1943. The Gestapo had ordered the director (his name was Wouters) to do so. I was good friends with Louis and Henk Verstegen and through them I heard about the call for volunteers. I recall going to a building in the St Joseph street and being interviewed by 3 Officers who at the conclusion of the interview told me that I had been selected for training in the Air force as aircrew. I grew about 20 cm when they told me this. I cannot remember being given any paperwork.



**Expelled from school by order of the Germans**



My biggest problem was to get my father to give his permission to join, for which he had to sign. Being 1 of 10 children and having 2 brothers who as University students were sent to Germany to work in the factories, it is not surprising that my Dad was reluctant to let me go. Finally he signed.

I reported to Eindhoven receiving centre on 31 March 1945 having just turned 19. My Dad and youngest brother saw me off on the train. I don't know if there were other receiving centres in the South.

I left Eindhoven with the other volunteers on 11 April 45 by truck for Oostende, Belgium and boarded a ship which sailed for Tilbury the same day. Where we spent the night I don't remember. We went by train to Wolverhampton arriving there on 12 April '45. The boys in our group all went to Wolverhampton, Wrottesley Park, where we stayed until 8 May '45.

From the first morning we were running around the camp as soon as the bugle woke us. I remember the mess hall and the trays of bacon, eggs and the sort and quantity of food we hadn't seen or tasted for years. This is where I was told that they put camphor in the food to suppress whatever was in us to excite us. True or not I don't know. I remember the lessons we were given in Morse code.

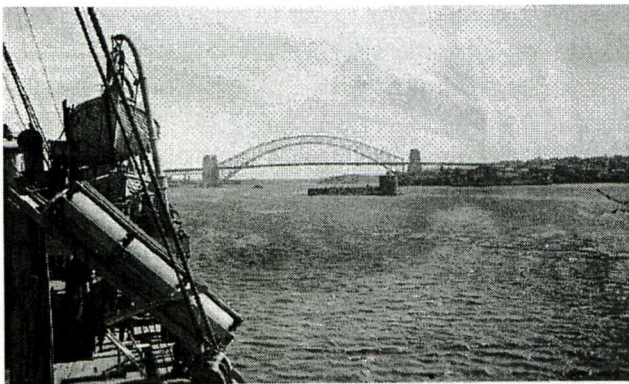
We were in Wolverhampton when Germany surrendered on May 5 '45. We had to stay in camp and celebrated in the canteen with big bottles of beer. Some clown amongst us played the old trick on me of pulling my chair away when sitting down after having been to the loo. I split my head open on the edge of the chair and finished up in the camp hospital to be stitched up. I know that I wasn't sober! To this day I don't know who did this to me. With those big bottles of beer he may not know himself.

Our group of 61 left camp on 8 May '45 for Liverpool where we boarded the *Rangitata*, a NZ vessel. We went down below and slept in hammocks. The cabins on the decks were for the Allied POWs being repatriated. While waiting to sail we sat on deck trying hard to avoid the droppings of the seagulls. I remember Churchill's victory speech being broadcast over the radio. The water was like glass but that didn't stop me getting seasick. As we cast off and went to sea this got worse and lasted for possibly 5 days. For all I cared they could have thrown me overboard.

Our first stop was Panama where, before we were allowed to leave the ship, we were warned about the evils of this city. We walked around but stayed together for our safety. As a 19 year old in 1945 we were innocent boys being let loose in a dangerous world.

From Panama to Wellington NZ. On the way we struck a severe storm which caused everyone but a few of us to be seasick - we had had our turn when the sea was flat. The ship with POW's returning got a musical reception when we reached Wellington and we watched the goings on from deck. Afterwards we were allowed to leave the ship and go into the city which was much quieter and more respectable than Panama. I don't remember getting a lecture before we went ashore.





**Entering Sydney Harbour 19.6.45**

We arrived in Sydney in the morning of 19 June '45 and I clearly remember sailing up the harbour towards the bridge. The ship moored at Woolloomooloo where there was again a musical reception for the returning POW's. Afterwards we boarded a double Decker bus and were taken to that part of Central Station where the Mortuary Chapel is. Here we boarded the train for Casino but no one told

us where Casino was, how far, how long, nothing. I remember the Central Coast and the green trees and the beautiful landscape which stretched as far as you could see.

When evening came I tried to lie down to sleep. In the luggage rack, under the seat, partly in the toilet. It was a long rattling night. We had breakfast in Grafton but I don't remember where we had an evening meal the evening before. We finally reached Casino South station by lunchtime and were transported to Victory Camp. More about this in my recollections of this camp.

We left Casino for St Ives for our jungle training on 29 July '45 and were billeted in Bradfield Park Camp. We were on exercise in the bush on 15 August '45 when news came through that Japan had surrendered. We returned to camp immediately and were given leave to go to town.

I stayed in camp as obviously I was not in the mood to join the festivities. Maybe I was not worldly enough. By end August we were back in Casino not really appreciating what Japan's surrender meant for us. We were told to pack up ready to be shipped to the Indies but this was called off when the Australian wharf labourers refused to load any Dutch ships.

A group of us went back to Sydney in early September '45 to take part in the Victory Parade.

We were billeted in a camp near Liverpool and were bussed to the city for the parade. There was a lot of drill prior to this march to get us up to standard. We carried .303 rifles the Dutch way which is much more difficult than the English/Australian way.

On 18 October '45 according to John de Wit's Diary [see story de Wit] we were ordered to surround the Javanese troops on morning parade as they had refused to carry arms as members of the KNIL, since Soekarno had declared Indonesia's independence on 15 August '45. We were armed and under orders. According to John there were 392 of them. As time went on this number rose to over 1000. Others may know the exact number. We marched them down the bottom part of the camp where we erected uprights, 2 rows of them and strung barbed wire along them to make a compound. I cannot remember much about the construction details but by night fall all the prisoners were contained and housed in big American Army tents. [This job was started by a local contractor, but finished by the boys.] Obviously all the material had been trucked into this space some time before. We knew little about it and most of us, as good boys did not question anything. About this time we were, without having been



asked or informed, transferred from the Air force into the Infantry. This was the end of our Air Force training.

The shooting of one of the Javanese by one of our boys was a dramatic event. I may have been on guard at the time but if I was I was positioned at the bottom end of the compound where you looked over the showers and the open air latrines.

This shooting caused much upheaval and brought in the local police and Australian Army brass. Again according to John this shooting happened on 18 Sept '46. We have lots of paper cuttings in John's diary in which these matters are reported including the refusal of the Communist controlled Australian wharfies to load the Dutch ships with either supplies or fuel for their boilers. In the end the Dutch captains of these ships took off anyway without pilots and with enough steam generated by burning wood to get on to the open sea where they met up with a bunker ship which supplied them with coal. All pre-arranged of course.

Our relationship with the Australian population of Casino was always good and I don't remember any upheavals. Of course the Australian population had much to lose financially if for instance the town had been declared out of bounds. Having turned part of the camp into a prison compound did not seem to make any difference.

On 13 Dec '46, after the last of the Javanese had been moved to Brisbane to be repatriated to Indonesia; we left for Brisbane and boarded the *Manoora* for Batavia. The ship also carried cattle on deck. We arrived in Batavia on 30 Dec '46 en route to Holland. Captain Sleeboom who was the camp commander in Casino interviewed us at an office in Batavia and asked us individually if we wanted to go back to Holland or back to Australia to be eventually discharged there.

I chose for Australia. I had lost my heart in Casino to Patricia Blackshaw.

I was given a job in the Welfare Dept and arranged travel within Indonesia for entertainers visiting to entertain the troops. I was provided with a motorbike to move around, a 250cc BSA.

I didn't have a motorcycle license but that was of no consequence. I was billeted in a camp on Goenoeng Sahari in the middle of Batavia along a river. The river was used by the locals to wash clothes and to bath. We had a baboe to do our washing, fetch our food etc. I didn't really get to know anyone as I was busy moving around the place to look after the transport needs of the visitors. One of the groups was a "kapel" [band] which had a male goat with big horns as a mascot.

He got a special ticket.

On 27 March '47, having received my movement orders to Melbourne, I flew via Surabaya to Brisbane where I arrived on 30 March '47. I went by train to Melbourne, was told to get back to Sydney and report for work on the wharves to load the Dutch ships. I was billeted at Air Force House in Goulburn Street until my discharge on 24 May '47 at the Dutch Consul's office in Margaret St. This was a Friday. I moved into a boarding house in Ocean St Woollahra on the Saturday to start my civilian life in Australia.

As to my training for air crew, it never happened and was never mentioned by my superiors.



## **Part two : Victory Camp Casino, 1945-1946, my memories.**

Above I have recorded "my potted history" of the camp. But there is much more to it than history and that is the human side of things.

When we finally arrived in Casino after a long train trip from Sydney we were offloaded in South Casino, not at Casino Railway Station which is located across the river. What I recall were the free standing houses all with tin roofs reflecting the sun. While for Casino it was winter time to us the weather was nothing like winter, more like a Dutch summer. It was the tin roofs that surprised us.

By bus or truck we were transported to Victory Camp and to the best of my recollections we went straight to the mess which was a large American tent. Was there an official welcome by the Commandant? Maybe there was but I cannot recall. However, they must have known that we were hungry and thirsty as the food was ready and the large bottles of beer stood on the trestle tables. Nothing fancy this mess, just a large tent on a dirt floor. Well, we held out our pannikin moving along the serving pots and insisted on big serves. One of the dishes was sambal which looked and smelled good but nobody told me that it was very "spicy" hot. Table manners took a back seat so I got "stuck in". Meat, rice and sambal. Talk about fire due to the sambal. Yes, I needed that large bottle of beer to quell the fire.

We were accommodated in huts and slept on a straw mattress. I remember being woken up the next morning by the warbling of the magpies and whenever I hear the magpies call now my mind immediately turns back to this first morning in Victory camp even if it is over 60 years ago.

Over time we were accommodated in tents but it didn't bother me were I was put. I was not one to complain. After all I was now in the Air Force and had to take orders. The future looked exciting what with being selected for air crew training but that fell by the wayside due to Truman's atom bomb which made Japan surrender on 15 August 1945. At that time we were doing our jungle training in St Ives, where we were staying in a detachment of Bradfield Park.

I recall that on a day of leave a group of us went to Manly where we had a swim. It was in July and in the middle of the Australian winter when most Australians wouldn't think of going into the water. That is why the locals looked at us as rather odd people.

At some time we were on a march through the back roads and a rest period was called. We were carrying our .303 rifle. In the distance we saw a water tank, galvanised iron. One of us, not me, took a shot at this tank which because of the force of the water on this one bullet hole caused the thing to collapse in a spectacular fashion. I cannot remember someone getting into trouble about this wanton destruction but we deserved punishment, at least the fellow who pulled the trigger.

I cannot remember any disharmony or disagreement amongst us. We all got along well with one another and with our superiors. Speaking personally I had little if any communication with the Javanese, Ambonese or West Indians even before the events of September 1945. The story got around that they spent a lot of their free time in South Casino where, by my understanding there was a brothel. It wasn't long before South Casino was declared "out-of-bounds" to all military personnel but that didn't stop them from bringing the women into camp, though not through the front gate!



As mentioned elsewhere things were unsettled after the Japanese surrender and the problems with Soekarno in Indonesia. The amount of information we were given was very little but we were young, inexperienced and very trusting of our superiors. Not being able to do anything with the Javanese troops who in fact had committed mutiny it was decided to put them all behind barbed wire with us as loyal troops guarding them, 3 days on, 3 days off, standing on the guard tower which was equipped with an Austen gun while our personal weapon was a .303 Lee Enfield. At night we used to walk along the perimeter of the camp without moving out of sight of the tower. During the winter when Casino can be as cold as Siberia, we used to light a fire to keep warm. There was plenty of wood from old trees. During our 3 hours off we used to hang around the guard hut, fry eggs, make toast, coffee etc.

I mentioned our Austen gun as the personal weapon while on guard. This weapon got in the way of one of our boys who the next day was scheduled to return to Holland. The story had it that his uncle was in the Dutch Parliament and had used his influence to have this lad returned. He was on his last watch. He was excited at the prospect of leaving it all behind and must have been nervous climbing down the ladder from the tower. Well, the safety mechanism of his gun got caught on one of the rungs of the ladder and caused the gun to fire. The bullet took the top of his penis, that is all. What a panic but it was only a flesh wound. He later became a priest. I saw him as a Deacon in 1951.



Guards with watchtower in the background

Life on guard was pretty boring and we needed to bring some excitement into our life. The Ambonese who were loyal soldiers lived in huts built on piers. Around these huts they kept chickens which roosted at night under the hut. So, one night we crept under the hut and grabbed one of the chickens. The chook couldn't make a noise as his neck

was between my fingers. I had seen my mother pluck a chicken so I knew what to do. Boiling water and a sharp knife. My mother would have been horrified at the waste but we didn't know what to do with the innards of the chook. During all this the Ambonese had gone to town so we had a free hand. We fried the chook in a pound of good Australian butter.

During most of my time in Casino I courted Patricia and I enjoyed open house at her home. Pat's father had been in France during WWI and he knew what it was like for us being away from home. A high percentage of the boys were Catholics coming predominantly from the South of Holland and thus we became involved in the Church. We formed a choir and sang the traditional Latin Gregorian hymns at Sunday Mass



and on special occasions such as the funerals of Simon Snepvangers and Kees van Esch.

The Parish Priest's attitude towards us was hard to follow. He probably thought that it was unfair to the Australian boys who had gone to war to have the local girls involved with those Dutch fellows. Anyway, he officiated at our wedding on 15 November 1947, and 6 months after I got my honourable discharge in Sydney.

I have recorded a few of my memories of Victory Camp Casino and could go on and on.

**KONINKLIJK NEDERLANDSCH-INDISCH LEGER**  
**KONINKLIJKE LANDMACHT**  
**HOOFDKWARTIER ADJUDANT GENERAAL**

No. 5702/A/HO/IIC  
Bijl.: Geene.  
Onderwerp: Overplaatsing Sld. v. Grinsven, C.

Afdeling: II  
Dienst: IIC  
Batavia, 22 Maart 1947

Hiermede verklaar ik, dat de Soldaat 1e kl. C. van GRINSVEN geboren 4 Maart 1926 van 6 Januari tot 22 Maart 1947 werkzaam is geweest bij den Dienst Welfare van het Hoofdkwartier Adjudant Generaal, als administrateur bij de Sectie Transport.

In dezen korten tijd heeft hij getoond een ijverig en energiek werker te zijn, zelfstandig te kunnen werken en leiding te kunnen geven bij administratieve werkzaamheden.

Ik kan hem als werkkracht ten volle aanbevelen.

Hameris den Adjudant Generaal  
Plv. Hoofd Dienst Welfare  
De Majoor,  
*H. Aries*  
**H. ARIES**  
Luitenant-Generaal van  
Hoogland.

KNIL Reference



I remember the hockey team we formed and which played in the North Coast competition. One of the movers and shakers of hockey was Jan van der Waerden. We of course played our national game, football [soccer] but not in a competitive way. And I remember the pranks we played; one of them was giving one of the fellows, who used to come in late at night and woke everybody up, a hint by putting a tin plate with water in his bed. There are lots more, but no doubt every one of us has these recollections.

We were boys coming out of occupied Holland, full of patriotism and a sense of adventure. I look back on my time in the Dutch forces with a sense of gratitude as it made me grow up quickly in a secure environment which was created for me by the boys around me, my superiors, the Blackshaw family and particularly Patricia who became the love of my life and to whom I was married for 58 years until death did us part in January 2006.