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The Hunger Winter: Occupied Holland 1944-1945



Synopsis

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

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Customer Reviews

"The Hunger Winter amounts to a general history of the Netherlands and its government during its nine months of waiting (for liberation from the Nazis), with the emphasis often most literally on what it felt like....(The story) moves along well, with much natural tragedy, pathos, and drama." -- Times Literary Supplement

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hands of the Germans, and to the south fighting raged for months. In the winter of 1944-45, just as other parts of Europe were being liberated, the Dutch seemed forsaken by the Allies, who bypassed Holland on their drive to Berlin. That last winter of the war, with its severe food and fuel shortages, was a terrible one for the Dutch people, who also suffered from episodes of Nazi terrorism. In some provinces there was nothing to eat but tulip bulbs and sugar beets, and eighteen thousand Dutch civilians actually starved to death. Henri van der Zee, who was ten years old that winter, remembers what happened to his people.

Very informative

Excellent account of that period in Dutch History.

Excellent book, should be read in every American High School.

"The Hunger Winter" by Henri A. van der Zee. Subtitled: "Occupied Holland 1944-1945" University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1982. This book is written in understated prose. Atrocities, shootings, retaliation arrests and slow starvation are all described in a matter-of-fact, quiet writing. The author, Henri A. van der Zee, was a Dutch boy of eleven years during much of the events recorded here. As brief as it is, the book is a fairly complete documentation of the struggle of the Dutch nation in the last winter of World War II. In September 1944, the great airborne assault, "Market Garden", failed at the last bridge before Germany. Hopes of the Dutch for a quick and easy liberation were dashed. The Dutch hopes were replaced by the despair of drawn-out starvation, mainly due to the inhumane actions and inactions of the German occupiers. Since the author, Henri A. van der Zee, actually lived through this "hunger winter", the book is filled with his personal reflections. But these personal reflections are interspersed through a substantially complete history of the times. The author describes attempts to cook both sugar beets and tulip bulbs to make these "vegetables" palatable to the starving Dutch children. He also describes their taste. The author spends a substantial portion of the book on the Dutch royal family, and how they tried, as best they could, to alleviate the suffering of their Dutch people. Queen Wilhelmina is the central character in that "governmental" aspect of the period, with good mention of the Dutch Prime Minister, Peter S. Gerbrandy. Winston Churchill called Gerbrandy, "Mr. Cherry Brandy", (p.35). Towards the end of the book, the author documents the absolute insensitivity of the German occupiers to the cruelty of permitting young children and women to slowly, slowly, slowly starve to death. This heartlessness should be of no surprise to any

student of World War II history, who would know that the overall policy of the German nation was to starve prisoners in concentration camps... whose names have become curses. This book documents that the occupied country of The Netherlands, the northern provinces, was transformed in all but name into an extra large concentration camp. German troops would jump out of a truck, grab Dutch men, shoot them dead and leave their bodies in a heap on a street corner. (See "terror tactics".) Fear was everywhere. People starved on the available rations. As the winter progressed, things got worse and the Germans under Reichskommissar Arthur Seyss-Inquart, (1892-1946), still did nothing to help. The neutral Swedes offered to send shiploads of food to occupied Netherlands and the Reichskommissar delayed and delayed. How many people died due to this sin of omission? All in all, this concise book covers much of the history of the winter of hunger which the Dutch suffered through as the war wound down to its end in May 1945. The author covers not only the atrocities committed by the Germans, but also the slowness of the Allies to respond to the plight of the occupied provinces, and the role that politics played in the attempts to relieve the starving Dutch citizens.

In modern times, famine is a catastrophe associated with the developing world. The only exception to this occurred in the Netherlands in the Second World War, where at least 12000 starved after the Nazis cut off food supplies to the uncooperative nation, determined to ensure ample food for the Reich. Complete calamity was avoided only with Germany's defeat in May of '45. The author lived through the experience, so his observations carry weight. The activities of all segments of Dutch society, from home grown Nazis to the Royal family, are found in these pages. And one can imagine the thrill at the end when victory was certain. No attempt is made to make heroes of the entire country. Many acted out of pure cowardice, greed or stupidity. I was impressed by how open the writer was on these matters. I would have preferred a bit more 'hunger' from the book though. Who starved and why? What areas of the country were worst affected? Van Der Zee gives us an interesting history of Holland in the last year of the war, but the famine gets somewhat short billing. Still an all around good work on a subject rarely explored in English.

I received the book a short time after ordering, I've already read the first 3 chapters. The book was in excellent conditions as stated on the website.

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