

## Memories: The 3rd March 1945

*An essay by Anneke Clementine-van Ravenswaaij, written one year after the 3 March bombardment*

It was early in the morning. The outside world was still hidden under a blanket of darkness. Despite the early hour we heard people busily walking up and down in the neighbouring houses. Everybody seemed suddenly to be tidying their homes, as much as one could with an almost finished stump of a candle as the only light.

The people were in a hurry, the work had to be finished before daylight, because around eight o'clock the airplanes would be here again with their deadly load of bombs. By then there would be no time left for household chores. We grabbed up the things which we thought of taking with us if we had to flee our house when the bombs hit it. We prepared ourselves for the expected hellish eruption. As quickly as possible we lighted our small stove and put a pan of sugar beets on it. My mother sighed 'I hope the beets are ready in time.' Once the bombing resumed it would be impossible to keep the fire burning with the small pieces of wood we collected in the street the day before.

We had to hurry since during the bombing we could not leave our hiding place under the stairway for longer than a few minutes. One of us had to sit by the furnace to boost the fire to get the beet porridge ready. We had just finished that when the sirens started to howl. We put on our overcoats which we had set ready the evening before. These we probably wouldn't take off before dark fell again.



In the meantime the roaring of the approaching planes became louder and louder. We put a very last piece of wood on the fire and then we all ran to our hiding place under the staircase. We just got there when a terrible blow shook our house, as if it was made of paper.

We heard the glass of a window somewhere in our house crash to the floor. But the house was still standing. The planes dived again and again above our heads. Then suddenly we heard loud hammering on our front door. Trembling I left my hiding place and ran to the door. A group of children rushed inside carrying a small girl. They had heard that my father was the last medical doctor who had remained in our neighbourhood.

The face of the little girl was soaked in blood. But not much could be done about that for the moment. First they had to join us under the staircase. As I closed the front door a bomb dropped close to our house. The doorknob was torn out of my hand. The window in the top of the door fell in a thousand pieces on the ground behind me. Amazingly enough I was not wounded.

The street was darkened by clouds of dust, -choking dust. And then we heard the planes leave. Their fifteen minute task was accomplished ! Soon they would return. Would we then survive? While my father helped the little girl, I went outside to look at what had happened. I saw that the last bomb had fallen just a few hundred meters away from our house.

The house which had been hit was a sorry sight. The curtains which had hung before the windows, were now hanging over the wires of the streetcar. The house was a smoking ruin. Almost immediately afterwards I saw people who were certainly not from our neighbourhood carrying away window frames and other things. Thieves of the worst kind!

And that while there were still people in that house buried under the rubble. Air defence people immediately started digging thru the rubble and after long and strenuous work four persons were uncovered, one was unconscious, two others wounded and one was already dead. Innocent people! But we didn't have much time to think about all this. The planes returned again! Everyone ran in panic to their houses. I was hardly inside when an airplane screamed overhead. There we were, the four of us back under the staircase, our heads together to make sure that if a bomb fell on our house we would all be killed at the same time. I looked at the face of Boem, my little brother, who stared with large frightened eyes at my mother 'Mammie, I am so afraid.'

We heard the rattle of a chain bomb, immediately followed by several consecutive bomb explosions. Our house shook now even more than before: the few front windows which were still intact were now in our garden. The mirror in the corridor crashed down with a huge clatter. And when we later entered the sitting room we saw that all furniture had been blown by the crash to the centre of the room.

My cat, Beauty, sat in a corner of the room with large fear filled eyes and my Scottish terrier, Tippy, whined softly. They had never experienced anything like this. What could it have been? The same moment the doorbell went. The first wounded person, a woman, was carried inside on a ladder. It looked as if her flesh had been cut from her body with a wooden spoon. Her dress, stockings and face were covered with blood. Shortly hereafter a young man limped inside with a towel round his leg. As I carefully removed the towel, I saw, again, a 'wooden spoon' wound. And these wounds bleed and bleed. Horrible! More and more victims kept arriving at our house and our room was soon changed into a kind of a hospital. All the wounded laid out next to each other on the ground. They were waiting for transport to a hospital.

In the meantime the bombing continued. By now it had become very cold in the house as there was of course no heating and every window was shattered.

After a while there were so many wounded in the room that getting the victims to the hospital became even more urgent. But still no ambulance arrived, so we had to take other measures. We went into the street to see whether we could stop any car or any transport whatsoever. Finally a car with buckets for the 'foodbank' ('gaarkeuken') came and with support of the people from the air defence we managed to remove the buckets from the car to make place for the wounded whom we had wrapped in our own blankets. The rest of the victims we ended up going to hospital in some old garbage truck.

By then it was dark and that meant no bombing for the day. Finally, we had time to eat our, by now cold, sugar beet porridge which we had prepared that morning. Just as we were 'enjoying' this culinary highlight, we heard a V 2 rocket thundering over our house. This one, fortunately, didn't stop. In the darkness (there was of course no electricity) we went to bed. We were all exhausted and fell asleep instantly, even without blankets. The next day, we would start again early.

We didn't know then that 'tomorrow' we wouldn't have a house anymore, because the next day would be the third of March.

*Den Haag, March, 1 1946 Anneke Clementine van Ravenswaaij*



Family van Ravenswaaij in 1942: Anneke, Cornelis (Boem), Annie en Theo van Ravenswaaij.





Boem van Ravenswaaij shows how they were under the stairs during the bombings before 3 March 1945 (2015)



The Laan van NOI was destroyed after the bombing in 1945 (foto: NIMH)

The letter from Anneke Clementine-van Ravenswaaij was presented by Jasmijn Derckx who is working on a book in 2021 that is based on thousands of letters from the international Van Ravenswaaij family. The letter can be read on the website BB45.nl of the 3 March '45 Foundation:

<https://www.bb45.nl/route/kruispunt-in-puin>

More drawings by Boem van Ravenswaaij about the war can be seen on the children's page of the website BB45.nl: <https://www.bb45.nl/kids/de-vragen>

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