

Adrian and Bertha Van As

So was Camp Westerbork during the war years, as I experienced it and how it lives in my memory. I opened the Distribution office in the camp and I also liquidated it again after I had, according to my wishes, brought the last Jewish prisoners back into the free world. I was the registration officer since 1944 through which I was able to save the whole archive and I had the opportunity to bring the inhabitants of the camp safely, through a no mans land period, back into a liberated country.

Not everything went the way I had hoped for.

I would have liked to see the people leaving home straight away after the liberation but that was not going to be. The west of Holland was still occupied and after the capitulation there was no possibility to bring them back because of the starvation tactics of the Germans during the winter 1944/45 There was no food and it was also very hard to get accommodation. There was certainly no reason to keep them any longer than needed. That there was a difference of opinion about I perfectly understood. So there were people who left on their own accord, but the majority stayed. I fully agree that living in a camp was not the best way of life so I tried to do everything to make life as comfortable as possible. Therefore I transferred them to the family units in which they could enjoy family life once again.

I had promised the Commander of the Province of Drenthe, Lt Col. Stok, to prepare the great barracks to accommodate the political delinquents of Holland. The first arrived on the 26th of April, way before the capitulation of the Germans.

It also became clear that the return caused more problems than what we expected. We counted on a happy return of our own Dutch Jewish people who were treated that badly by the Germans. Sadly enough that was not the case. The anti propaganda of the Germans had also an ill effect on the mentality of the Dutch. Before the war you could hardly speak of anti semitism in Holland. The Jewish people were very much integrated in our society. After the war there was a noticeable difference. As a whole one did not want to see the Jews come back. Several reasons were there for it.

However the main reason was that quite a lot of Jewish possessions were hidden by the Dutch but not all of them did it to help but more for personal gain. So the return became for them a great disappointment! Now they had to give it all back again and that created an antipathy. But was not that their perfect right to claim their own property back again? Or that of their family who did not survive? Would not they have preferred to see their own family back again instead of putting up a legal battle to get only the memory of them?

We have send, out of the existing stock, a two ton truck full of provisions to the west after the liberation. That as a gift of gratitude from the Jewish community towards their suffered Dutch fellow men in the west. The reply from the non Jews did not confirm, in many respects, the same feelings and to accept them once again as 100% Dutch.

With the last transport of once again free Jewish Dutch people I resigned from the job as Camp Intendant. I left, with my family, with them to enjoy a short holiday. We went to Rotterdam. I did not had a holiday during the whole of the war. I was given an audience by the Dutch Prime Minister, Prof. Schermerhorn, who, as a former head of one of the resistance groups, the K.P., wanted to know my experiences.

After my return I liquidated the Distribution office which was run, during my absence, by my former boss, Mr. Pool, who was at that time as a political delinquent an inmate of the camp. The Distribution was taken over once again by the municipality of Westerbork as it was before 12 October 1942. I was promoted to Inspector and the Military Commander allowed me to stay for the time being in Westerbork. On the 1st of April 1946 I was transferred to the Department of Public Works in The Hague.

There was after the war a lot of criticism why there was never made an attempt to blow up the railway track . That thought have been in our mind but was rejected because of the following reasons:

Firstly, if that would have happened it would have endangered the security of the people in the surrounded area. The Germans would have retaliated by arresting at random and killing a number of them. They were not interested in guilt! They just retaliated and made no effort first of searching for the guilty ones! That was a risk we could not take.

Secondly, it may never be forgotten that by the Germans solving the Jewish problem was a first priority (kriegswichtig). It had priority over every thing! In Holland there were at least four border railway crossings. Then there were also the crossings from Belgium and France into Germany. To have any form of success we had to blow up all these crossings and that was impossible. There was no resistance organisation who could coordinate such a project. On the other hand it would have been far easier to detect such a plan because the Germans had a perfect working intelligence service headed by Schreieder. A person who could not be charged after the war because of the failure of the English intelligence what had caused the death of at least 200 Dutch people.

This was known as the England Spiel. Furthermore we have to take into account that even if there would not have been a possibility to transport them by rail they would have done it by any other means of transport or even walk them across. Resistance is not something what could be worked out behind a desk. It was most of the time a reaction on a action from the occupier and that had to be done promptly.

No, for what had happened we can blame the allies. They knew what the Germans were doing and so did the Vatican! They did not do anything to warn the people in the occupied territories of the atrocities. It should have been made public by radio, by pamphlets dropped from their planes! They should have done everything to arouse a panic situation. But they did nothing! Why? We have never received a clear answer about that. They gave the Germans a permit to go ahead with the "endlosung", the final solution! Therefore let in the first place the Allied Governments of those days dive into their own bosom and admit with a blush to their cheeks

that many atrocities could have been prevented if they would have acted earlier. They could have even prevented the second world war. But the anti war forces had weakened too much the power of those nations. Because of that Chamberlain gave Hitler the go ahead by making an agreement with Hitler, in 1938, to allow Germany to annex Tsjecho Slowakia. Chamberlain believed he had saved the peace. Germany accepted this as a nod to go ahead with their plans to finish off the Jewry in Europe. The free world salved their conscience.

The refusal to accept the refugees who left by ship, the St. Louis, from Hamburg in 1939 is another black page in the history of the free world. The kristallnacht, 9/10 November 1938, had proven what the intentions of the nazi regime were. This should have given the Allies enough evidence to act promptly. Also the Christian world did not protest! Why? Was that the influence of the Replacement Theology? Was that in accordance to what they preached? "Love your neighbour as yourselves."? How does one reconcile that? Because of that Germany was strenghtened in their opinion that there was no difference of opinion in the free world and therefore was going to sit on the shelves. That made Hitler say that he only did what Christianity had preached for centuries. That is the responsibility of. the free world and cannot exonerate itself for what had happened. Neither the Churches as what Rev. Niemoeller admitted, but by then it was too late:

"First they came for the Jews but I said nothing
Because I was not a Jew
Then they came for the communist but I said nothing
Because I was not a communist
Then they came for the members of the unions but I said nothing
Because I was not a member
Then they came for me! But there was nobody to speak for me"

Because of that Germany and the Churches are together responsible for the murder of 6 million members of the covenant. God's chosen ones!

I am writing now about what happened nearly 60 years ago. The to days generation does not know anything about what happened in the last world war and is for a majority not interested. Life goes on and has its own problems. One does not want to live by what happened in the past. That past is only of interest for those who actually lived through it. One can think about what interest they had in what had happened during the French Revolution. Nothing either. In that time a lot of people lost their lives on the guillotine. There was also suffering. Many lost their loved ones and could never forget.

My wife and I have contemplated seriously several times to leave Camp Westerbork because it became quite often too difficult to bear the responsibility especially as far as our children were concerned. But all the time we gave in to the pressure put on us by the population. Their argument was that it could only made things worse for them if I left. Especially the last nine month of the war overtaxed my nerves. The Germans brought 200 extra service police (S.D.) in the province. They started to comb out the whole district in search for hidden Jews and men under the age of 40, who resisted the call to work as relief workers in Germany. That

made us doubt if we could ever survive the war. This was a reason for Bouman, the greengrocer, to convince us that he would make sure our children were being looked after in case something would happen to us. Luckily we survived. Many of us however did not! Therefore my salute goes to them.

After the liberation in 1945 there was no interest in what happened to those 6 million Jews who were murdered by the Germans. One was more interested in their own suffering. There were also losses especially in the west of Holland because of the starvation policy of the Germans during the winter 1944/45. Not any earlier than in the mid seventies one started to pay more attention to what had happened to our Jewish community. Why needed twenty years to pass? I believe because no one actually believed in the first instance that God's chosen ones could survive after the decision of the United Nations to establish a homeland in Palestine for the Jews. Not even the United Nations believed it! The decision looked more like to get rid of the Jewish problem for ever! The Churches were not supportive either. Because the Replacement Theology, in which they believed the Jews were finished and that the Church had taken her place, played such a major role and it still does up to this day." There is no longer a holy land and there are no holy cities any more! Christ is king all over the world!"

That so many Palestinians left Israel in 1948 was a consequence of a promise given by king Hoessein that within a fortnight they could return because by then the Jews would have been driven into the sea.

There were at the time Israel declared its independence approximately 650000 Jews living in Israel. Mainly elderly people, invalids, some sick survivors from the concentration camps and children. Hardly any weapons, no tanks no planes. This against an enemy of 50 million, heavily armed with the most modern weapons. Even England left their weapons to the Palestinians!

But what happened? They won!!! This is the greatest miracle of the twentieth century! And even if the world would not accept that at that time they won once again in 1956, in 1967, in 1973! Could that have changed their minds after all? That there was still a place for the State of Israel? For the Churches: Could it still be possible that the Lord kept His covenant with them? Since that time the World Council of Churches have exactly declared that! Later on also the Vatican has accepted that the Covenant was never abrogated.

Now Camp Westerbork has been demolished. The municipality wanted to get rid of it and the Government had another need for it. After the war it was for the first four years used as a detention centre for political delinquents. In 1949 the whole inventory was sold but shortly thereafter it had to be refurbished again. Holland had to cope with another problem. It was forced to bring from Indonesia, after it got its independence, those loyal Indonesians who served in the Colonial Army, mainly Moluccans, to Holland. So Camp Westerbork became once again important and got a new name. "De Schattenberg" a small hill in the vicinity of the camp. Not any earlier but 1972 Westerbork able at long last to demolish it except for the house of the Camp Commandant.

In 1981 a museum was opened in the neighbourhood of the camp. That was the first real effort after the queen had unveiled in 1980 a monument on the grounds of the camp near the former potato cellar. It was a difficult start, because a lot was lost. Nowadays it is well established and enjoys world interest.

Since September 2000 Israel is suffering once again under an intifada. The world is becoming more restless and in majority it prefers to see Israel wiped of the map because it believes that it is the only way to solve the problem in the Middle East. Also there is less support from the Churches. Without a doubt has the visit of the Pope, last year, to do with it. No word of protest has been heard about what Bashar Asad of Syria said, during that visit, to the Pope. Not even the *l'Osservatore Romano*!

"There are always those who seek to recreate the (Jesus) journey of suffering and pain among people" Asad said at the welcoming ceremony for the Pope as he arrived in Damascus on a pilgrimage retracing the steps of Paul. "We see our brothers in Palestine being killed and tortured. We see that justice is being violated, lands are being occupied in Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine." Asad said, clearly referring to but not naming Israel. Are we going to experience once again what Rev. Niemoeller regretted when it all was too late? Are we going to try once again to repudiate God's chosen once? I am convinced that even if they want to, they will not succeed. This Israel will never be wiped of the map again! The world have to face what is written in Zech. 12: 3 " And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it."

Last but not least I will pay tribute to the wife Bertha with whom I shared my life for 58 years and who sadly passed away in 1999. Without her it would not have been impossible what we did. I wish to pay high tribute to her because she had to do the most difficult and dangerous job! She had to bring the documents in and out the camp hidden under her corset. Riding a bicycle is not difficult but it becomes very much different when it has to be done with a solid tyre in the front. This through all sorts of weather and across a road which was quite often under attack of English Spitfires. Therefore she had to dive many a times into a ditch on the side of the road and that even in a period of pregnancy. Her name should be kept in high honour.

Adrian Van As