Liberation of the Municipality of Heer on Wednesday 13 September, 1944

QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY

31 August, 1944

31 August, 1944

Our two children and those of our neighbors are celebrating today. P.S. for security reasons this picture is dated 8 September, 1944.
After D-Day (6 June 1944 in Normandy) the Allies are making a lot of progress in France, according to English radio! The first signs of retrieval by the German Army from Northern France are being noticed here as well. More and more traffic from Belgium and France passes through Maastricht.

1 September, 1944

More traffic headed towards Germany. Germans on bicycles and other means of transportation, some of them confiscated, are passing by on their way to Aken.

2 September, 1944

A new procession of Germans, seated in trucks, camouflaged with green twigs, and other automobiles is passing by in a great hurry.

3 September, 1944

From what we can see, the retreat happens rather undisciplined. Frankly, it is extremely chaotic. The Germans are taking literally everything! On the trucks the soldiers are carrying everything, sheep – cows – calf – pigs – ducks, yes even rabbits in wooden cages!
AIR-RAID SIREN. The English (at least that is what we thought, only the English are patrolling the skies) are unloading their machine guns on the German procession, that is very easy to hear.
P.S. Yesterday, 2 September 1944, I went to the "Grote Markt" in Maastricht and took a variety of pictures of the retreating Germans (thanks to Mrs. v.d. B. who owns a shoe store at the Markt. With her permission I was able to take pictures from the first story window on the street side). See pictures 1 through 14.

4 September, 1944

Everything points at the fact that the German Army is retreating indeed. According to the news on the radio, the Allies are advancing more and more. Air-raid sirens again. The English air force is on top of the retreating Germans again.

5 September, 1944

“WATCH OUT! Do NOT go to work on your bicycle”, that is what people were saying this morning. The Germans confiscate each and every bicycle that still functions. The highly regarded German “Kameradschaft” (“fellowship”) is hard to find amongst the Germans passing by: regular infantry that is marching on the Akersteenroad in Heer and, according to them have been marching for well over 60 kilometers for the past days, are coming from the Leuven (Belgium) area, are being passed by their own trucks and are no longer being loaded up. They are therefore forced to walk back to their “Heimat” (“homeland”).

6 September, 1944

The radio announces: Huge advancements by the Allies in Northern France. Their troops have already conquered five bridge heads over the river Maas (Meuse). Continued retreat by the Germans in France. We were able to see this as well, more and more German materials are passing by!

7 September, 1944

The Allied planes are getting more and more active in the skies. They say: retreating German processions are being fired at on the road between Cadier and Keer all the way to Margraten. The same news is being reported about the road between Valkenburg, Old-Valkenburg, and Gulpen. Reports state that a train is on fire near Beek. Late morning: More infantry is passing by, most of them on foot and some of them on farm trailers, from the direction of Northern France and Belgium. It is hard to believe that retreating troops are carrying so much junk! Old washing machines, sofas, chairs, cabinets, desks, etcetera. All originating from their former offices in the occupied areas! The cavalry is now on the retreat as well. They are passing through with their cannons and accessories.

8 September, 1944

They say: “Last night around thirty minutes past midnight the Germans blew up a train bridge between Maastricht and Lanaeken (however we never heard anything?). During the course of the day we observed heavy artillery from the allies coming from Belgium (direction of Eben-Eymael over the Saint Peters mountain in Maastricht) and directed towards the German installations located at the edge of the woods right passed the Voordijgesticht in Heer and towards to Gronsveld and Eysden. According to our observations, the German artillery fires of about 2 to 4 shots per 30 minutes while the Allies answer with around 5 to 10 shots every 10 minutes. We learned from local railroad employees, who were returning home, that the German intentions were to blow up the entire railroad emplacement in Maastricht-Wijk. Indeed we heard more and more explosions

from the Maastricht-Wijk direction this morning and they were followed by large smoke clouds rising over the homes in Wijk (I have some pictures of this). They say: the Germans are literally destroying everything! Locomotives, telegram and telephone installations, water hydrants, hoist cranes, turn bridges, etcetera. In short everything is being blown to pieces.

BERG EN TERBLIJ

A huge formation of American and British bombers, escorted by allied fighter planes, is flying over us. The air raid sirens continue for almost two hours. At that moment I and the son of a farmer-friend of us from Berg en Terblij were harvesting on a piece of land located on the Bemelerberg between Bemelen and Berg en Terblij. When we heard the shooting in the distance, we took the horse and trailer and hid in a ditch as we were afraid that the horse would get hid by shrapnel flying around. We just reached our hiding place when it started; German fighters offloaded on the British squadron that was flying over us. We had a very good view through the bushes in front of our hiding place. The squadron consisted of at least 450 bombers and a large number of fighter planes.
We made it back home that afternoon. Air raid sirens for almost three hours. The American and British fighters are flying over Maastricht, Vaals, and Aken at very low altitudes. The same reports are now coming from Valkenburg, Gulpen, Vaals, etcetera as well. The allied planes are no longer being attacked by German planes. It is being said that this afternoon at three o'clock the Germans are planning to blow up the bridges in Maastricht. However, at six o'clock this afternoon nothing has happened yet!
Seven o'clock in the afternoon. Unexpectedly the traffic on the Akersteenweg in Heer has gotten very quiet. Only a few trucks and some infantry are passing by. SUDDENLY an exchange of machine gun fire that lasts for at least 10 minutes and we can hear it coming from the direction of Even-Evmael across the Belgian border. From our attic window we can now also see artillery fire from the direction on Tongeren. They say that American scouts and spiders have shows themselves in Wolder but have retreated again. 10:30PM: Artillery is starting again but it is quiet overnight (around midnight my wife and I laying under the blankets and listening to the British radio. This is how we knew many hours in advance about the rumors that would go on in our neighborhood the next morning. It was a sport to keep this all secret). Thanks to Mr. Allard, a radio technician, who still resides in Heer, who supplied me with the necessary items to build a shortwave radio that did his duty for us for a long time.

9 September 1944

It is rather quiet this afternoon in Wijk-Maastricht and no traffic to speak of either. According to me this was the “silence before the storm”. The radio station no longer broadcasts. They say that the Germans used hand grenades to disable the telephone facility in Maastricht. We cannot even use our phones anymore!

10 o’clock in the morning. On recommendation of the occupiers, the mayor of Heer issued an order to all men between 18 and 55 years of age to report to town hall to sign up to perform groundwork for the Germans. My brother Jos and I skipped out of town in the direction of Bemelen and stayed there the entire day. My neighbor Mr. Jan Bootz stayed at home and never showed himself outside. Mr. van der Rydt, together with Mr. Henk Nieuwenhuis and Math Pieters (who owned the Jamin shop on the Akersteenweg), also left for Bemelen and did not return home until after dark that evening. They will not get us to dig so-called one-man trenches. Later we learned that none of the men reported themselves. The German plan to quickly establish a few last strongholds completely failed. It would have been of no use anyway as evidenced by the huge number of tanks and other equipment that passed through Heer on the way to Germany. The radio reported: a large concentration of American, British and other Allied forces are gathered near Luik-Tongeren-Hasselt- Bourg Leopold and in the Belgian camps. This same day a large formation of allied aircraft passes over us on their way to Aken, Germany. The air raid sirens sound for three hours! Again, the allied fighter planes are flying at low altitudes over the area of Heer-Gulpen-Waals via Valkenburg towards the German border.

2:30 in the afternoon. Lightnings are making runs over the highway Heer-Gulpen-Vaals-German border. From the direction of Cadier and Keere and further of towards Margraten large smoke clouds are visible. They say that all traffic on this road is under fire and being destroyed.

2:40PM Maastricht. An English fighter dives towards the city. From where we are we can see it is dropping two shiny bombs. They must have landed near the train station. A tremendous plume of smoke rises, nothing else. Later we learned that the bombs hit the area of Zeven Winkels, near the Meersenerweg, but that they were intended for the railroad station in Wijk-Maastricht.

4:00 in the afternoon. Reports are coming in that some bombs hit homes on the Meerssenerweg located behind the Wijk-Maastricht station (I question the reports of at least six deaths and a far higher number of heavily injured as nothing is heard about this later on). At 5 o’clock in the afternoon we hear that SS officers are picking up men and force then them to build defensive positions. 7:00PM German tanks are retreating in the direction of Scharn-Heer. 7:45PM Heavy artillery in Maastricht based on our observation of flames towards the night sky. Possibly directed towards the Bilserbaan or Tongersche weg. The smoke and fire was clearly visible from our attic window. It is followed by gun

and machinegun fire but in far shorter bursts than earlier. Due to the silence on the Akersteenweg this was very easy to hear. It almost appeared as if the shots were now coming from the St. Petersberg and surroundings. The shooting continues until 9 o'clock in the evening and today the air raid sirens sounded fro at least seven hours! The silence is suffocating and it does not predict anything good. Will the Allied gets here after all? The tension in our neighborhood intensifies by the minute. Everybody is outside in the streets and discusses the developments of the day. Rumors are spreading that American tank divisions have been pushed back along the Maas. However our short-wave radio picks up that the Americans have conquered Luik. They are now advancing in the direction of Verviers and on the other side of the river Maas towards Tongeren and onwards! Sunday 10 September. Air raid sirens again! We are rather used to that by now. Especially when, like today, the sirens sound for the sixth time! Again British fighters are attacking German troops in the direction of Bemelen and Valkenburg. From the back of our house we can clearly see huge columns of smoke and fire. The machine guns on the allied fighter planes rattle non stop. 7:00PM. From the direction of Noorbeek and Eysden we observe new attacks by the Allied planes and more and more retreating Germans come under attack. We, the residents of Heer, have to leave the streets by 8PM!! But at 8:15 and much later we are all still outside and discussing the developments of the day. Nervous and exciting days!

10 September 1944

8:15 in the afternoon. Suddenly there is a loud noise in the sky. Explosions of grenades possibly fired from behind the St. Pietersberg in the direction of Eben-Eijmael or even further towards Belgium, and landing in the area of the windmill in Gronsveld and even further towards Eysden as well as in the area around the Enci factory in between Gronsveld and Maastricht. Large columns of smoke are now very visible from our attic window. Rumor is that the Germans spent the entire day preparing artillery sites in this area as well as at the edge of the forest between Keerberg and Gronsveld and in Heer and Bemelen. In the pastures left of the Heuts-Meulenberg farm and in the pastures near Café Bogman in Heer additional artillery sites have been built as well. Allied grenades are exploding every 10 minutes. Large billows of smoke are hanging over the valley near the Enci factory and over the highway between Heer and Gronsveld. Air raid sirens again! Later on that evening, around 9PM, we spot more plans in the skies. At around 9:15PM more flares rise from the area where the grenades exploded earlier (see pictures). At 1:15 in the morning we clearly hear gun and machinegun fire from the direction of Mesch and Eijsden. 9:50 in the evening. EVERTYHING IS QUIET IN HEER. Only from the direction of Battice (Belgium) we can still observe the continuing light flashes from the artillery against the evening sky. The English radio reports that the Allied troops have progressed to the south side of Maastricht! Air raid sirens sound again tonight. Obviously the Germans

are enjoying letting the “Klederding” roar as they are the first ones to find safe cover. They say that there was a tank battle yesterday near the Albert Canal and near the bridge in Wolder. The Allied troops are said to have advanced northwards in the direction of Maaseijck. 10 o’clock in the evening. It is quiet in and around the municipality of Heer.

Monday 11 September 1944

Everything is quiet in Heer, no gun shots to be heard. That was at 8 in the morning but at 9 o’clock the air raid sirens sound again. Large number of allied aircraft on their way to Germany, unsuccessfully chased by a couple of German fighter planes that are being held off by allied fighters. 11:45 in the morning. We can clearly hear and see grenades exploding near the windmill in Gronsveld. They definitely land near the German artillery sites. We hear them being fired at a rapid pace from the direction of Kanne and Klein and always in groups of four. A sound similar to the announcement of the English radio and the first four tones of Beethoven’s fifth symphony: TA-TA-TA-TA. These grenades are fired by the Allied troops from behind the St. Peterberg.

5:00 in the afternoon. Heavy artillery fire again this time from the direction Heer-Gronsveld. My little brother and I went to take a look. We went on foot, straight through the no man’s land near the Molenweg, to my sister’s house in the direction of Gronsveld. Just outside of Heer we stopped at the beginning of the trees near Gronsveld. There is was: first the sound of the firing than the whistle through the sky followed by the impact of grenades at the edge of the woods between Heer and Gronsveld. We both stood behind a large tree and calculated how much time we would need to get from the tree line to the first trench, situated on the right side of the road. These were so-called “Luftschutzgraben, one-man trenches, and it was clear to see that they had been dug the day before as they were still fresh! We had just reached the first little trench and there it started again! First the launching sound followed by the whistling of the projectiles flying over and followed by the impact. Additional serious explosions now to the left of us as well, all the way to the center of the field and the edge of the woods, as far as we could see from our trenches. After that a period of silence. We took advantage of that period and moved to the next trenches and so on until we reached the houses. As the surroundings were very quiet we could clearly hear parts of the exploded grenades land on the road and they sounds like marbles. Before we even reached my sister’s house there was another barrage, always four shots at a time, so we jumped back into some trenches on the side of the road and waited there until everything was quiet again. We continued like this until we reached our destination. The habitants of the neighborhood we reached were all in their air-raid shelters. Many of them had been in there day and night since Thursday. This shelter was extremely safe and could not be seen from the sky. But based on the large number of people inside,

it appears rather small. There was also a lack of light. When we went back home, it was spooky silent. Because my brother was not able to go, that night I went back by myself to drop off some candles and matches. Less than 25 meters from the shelter, four more grenades whistled through the sky and they landed around 25 to 50 meters behind the shelter in the open field in the direction of the woods. Before I returned home that evening I waited until it was quiet. Get up – run to the next trench and wait – quickly to the next trench and so on until I reached the first tress near Heer. That is when I was safe again. More air-raid sirens around 10:30 that evening. Riffle and automatic gun fire was noticeable much more than the previous nights. The Allied had advanced even closer to Heer!

Tuesday 12 September 1944

Around 12:30 at night. The German artillery installations behind Café Logman towards Bemelen, and behind us near Scharn, responded heavily to the allied bombings from the day before.
2:00 at night. Wide awake due to the German fire. This repeated itself again at 3 o'clock, 4:30, and 6:30 that night. We all slept together, including the Maas family, in the reinforced basement under our house but we did not sleep much that night!
0:45 at night. Suddenly heavy artillery. These grenades landed in the area of the Church of Heer or near the Barakkenstraat.
9:45. Repeated allied grenade attacks. Many English "Lightnings" (with their double tails) in the skies above Heer. Multiple air-raid sirens. Riffle and automatic gun fire from the direction of Mesch and St. Geertruid. Air-raid siren! From 1:30 until approximately 5:00 in the afternoon uninterrupted artillery activity. Plumes of smoke rise to the skies in the direction of Cadier and Heer as well as from St. Geertruid and from the neighborhood of the Theresia church near the Tngerse road. They say: "The Americans have passed Visé and one group has already reached Dutch territory near Mesch and Noorbroek." "The highway between Heer and Aken has been closed off." We notice something is going on as the German trucks and equipment are no longer moving towards Keer and Aken but are now moving through the Heer intersection towards Sittard.
7:55 in the evening. The Allies are firing at the German artillery positions near Café Bogman in Heer. Everyone in our neighborhood is outside discussing the developments of the day. Then, unexpectedly, additional grenade salvos. Multiple explosions but now very close! Everyone quickly into the basements. What could have happened? The grenades landed in the homes of the Kusters and Meesters family at the Akersteenweg, near the intersection in Heer. (Café Bremers, as well as the homes in its vicinity, have been completely destroyed). They say: Eyssel was liberated today! Back into the basements (although I used to hate feeling trapped in that basement in case something would happen, it seemed like a pretty safe place under the circumstances). Flashlight, candles,

linens and sleeping gear, everything downstairs. Reinforced the entrance to the basement again. If we freeze to death, we freeze to death!!
Now we are under fire. That night many windows busted at the crossroads in Heer, the entire Concordiastraat is damaged as well as the buildings in the Damstraat. They say that a total of 16 grenades landed and exploded. The first one landed in the air-raid shelter that was under construction in the park across from the houses on the Concordiastraat. A good thing that this shelter had not been completed yet else many people would have gotten killed! Every indication is there that the Allies, coute que coute, are trying to take over the German artillery positions. The neighbors are saying that grenades have also landed in the direction of Scharn, near Dr. Hoebregt's home. Nobody knew if anyone got hurt. That evening Mr. v.d. Rijdt, at that time head of the air protection and living on the corner of Demertstraat and Rijproots in Heer, came to pick me up. "Whether I could come over immediately with electrical lights!" He knew that I had made a large and long burning flashlight that gave a lot of light but that one could cover as well so to only leave a small sliver of light that allowed you to see while walking on the road. You have to hurry up, he said. The light at Dr. Neven's house on the Dorpstraat is no longer working and they have brought wounded people there. While taking cover next to the houses I arrived at Dr. Neven's house. That evening I was very helpful to Dr. Neven with my flashlight. Downstairs in his basement there was a wounded German soldier who had to die. His whole torso was literally torn open. He kept crying for his mother. This soldier was hit by Allied shrapnel while walking near the crossroads in Heer. One of the pieces of shrapnel had hit one of the hand grenades he was carrying on his belt. One of these grenades exploded and ripped him apart. This young soldier (16 years old) came from Beieren (catholic) and had a lot of difficulties speaking. The Pastor of Heer had his address and would, when the time was there, inform his parents. This soldier had left the Arbeidtansatz only two months earlier and joined the army. That evening two heavily wounded individuals were transported on a cart with a mattress by volunteers of the Luchtbeschermingsdienst (whose names I do not know but I would like to mention this any way as they did a very good deed) from Heer to the Calvarie Hospital in the Abtstraat in Maastricht. It was impossible that evening to get a car anywhere. Even Dr. Neven no longer had a car. A few days earlier it had been confiscated by the Germans. He also had to go on foot or, if possible, by bicycle.

That same evening Ms. N.N. was brought in as well. While walking near the crossroads, shrapnel had hit her nose and cut off the tip and another piece had landed in her butt cheek. Dr. N. used the last iodine he had and it helped stopping the bleeding. P.S. I forgot to mention that Ms. Van Ooj, her father, as well as Mr. v.d. Rijdt, Mr. Van Hil, as well as some members of the L.B.D., assisted Dr. Hoeberechts and Dr. Neven taking care of additional wounded. At

10:30 that night I returned home after fleeing to the basement two more times due to the air-raid sirens.

At 11:00 o'clock on the evening of 12 September 1944 the Allied bombardment finally started and it was directed towards the Concordiastraat and surroundings. What lead up to this? Well, the following: after the Allies had tried for days to silence the German artillery, the Germans had found something. They retaliated that night. The Germans drove some of their artillery from Café Bogman to the old Heerderbridge, fired some shots on the way, and returned to their original positions. The Americans responded and fired in the direction of where the shots originated to find out where the artillery was stationed. This is how our street came under fire. There was a rattling salvo every 5 minutes but not all hit target. Fortunately else no homes in and around the Condordiastraat would have survived and may people would have been killed or seriously injured. We all sat downstairs in the basement and waited for what would happen next. Outside it was so dark, you could not see anything. Nobody had to wind up the alarm clock that night as the Allied fire would surely keep us all awake.

Wednesday 13 September 1944

That night at 03:15 the first grenade fragment hit our home. The entire house vibrated. Chalk fell off the basement wall. The sound of breaking glass. When it got quite for a minute my wife and I went upstairs. We had to use our feel as we were too scared to switch on any lights. One big mess, lots of dust. Very dark – entering the rooms on touch only. A large grenade fragment had entered through the side window, ripped a whole in the wooden door, bounced of the opposite wall, and had come to rest in a closet in the next room. All in all it was not too bad especially compared to the destruction to the homes across from us on the Akersteenweg the night before. Dust, dust and more dust that was really all. Nothing special otherwise. At 3:55 the next hit occurred, this time upstairs in the children's bedrooms. Fortunately the room was not blown off the house, we said. Back in the basement we discuss the situation. We all get more and more quiet. Everyone thinks his own thoughts, especially of what else could happen tonight. There will be so many grenade explosions overnight that no more than two homes in our street will survive the night, or so we thought!
5:10 in the afternoon. The bombardment has slowed down only slightly. 13 September 1944.
6:00 in the afternoon. The grenade fire has moved behind us, towards Berg en Terblyt and Bemelen. We wonder what the purpose of this bombardment is. Obviously the Allies have not been informed properly. Else they would have known that during the past two days there have not been any Germans in the area of Heer-Scharn-Bemelen. Only that darn artillery was still present on the hill near Keer. Probably to cover the retreat! Also the canons, initially located near

the barracks in Heer, had been moved last Monday in the direction of Bemelen and Keer.
7:30 PM. The Concordiastraat looks desolate. Power lines are on the ground. There is no electricity. Holes in the roads, holes in walls. Shattered glass from broken windows everywhere, and so on. Every now and then residents carefully exit their homes. The artillery is silent! “How are things at your place?” people ask. Followed by their stories about what happened to them last night and what scared them so much. Fear, a much discussed topic! “Last night a baby was born is one of the homes on the Concordiastraat where the Niewenhuis family lives, welcomed to this world by the thunder of artillery! The mother and child remained in the basement under the stairs that night. The house on top of them was fully destroyed.” A grenade exploded right in the home of the neighbors, the v.d. Rijdt family consisting of the father, mother, and six children and left nothing of their house. The occupants, the v.d. Rijdt family, still live in Heer on the Demertstraat on the corner off the Rijprooststraat. During the night of the bombardment they were accommodated in the homes or various residents on the Concordiastraat. Later on they moved to a different home.

Wednesday 13 September 1944, morning time

German soldiers, limited in numbers, move by the homes in Heer on their way to Gronsveld. They are fully covered with ammunition belts, armor fists, and hand grenades. ALL DOORS MUST BE OPENED! Everywhere in Heer the traces of last night’s bombardment are clearly visible.
9:30 in the morning. The bombardment resumes!
Around noontime. Grenades explode again in our street. All the residents are back in their basements. Someone knocks on the door. “come quick, a woman just died. They took her away.” Later on we learned that is was Mrs. Debouille. My wife has been talking to her on the street corner not more than 15 minutes earlier. The grenade fire has moved behind us in the direction of Terblijt and Bemelen. One cannot describe the silence in our neighborhood. The Akersteenweg is deserted. There is nobody on the streets, not even a dog! They say: The Germans want to defend our village. A summary of last night’s bombardment: 1 dead, 3 heavily wounded, and a couple of lightly wounded.
Wednesday 13 Sept. 1944, 2:40PM
Air-raid sirens sound in Maastricht, three times in a row. Both bridges over the Maas river have been blown up by the Germans. Someone knocks on the door. “If I was willing to come and help”. The neighbors wanted to find a safer home for Mrs. Nieuwenhuis, who had a baby last night. Mrs. Vromans wrapped the baby in some blankets and, with the help of some other neighbors, carefully took her through the rubble on the street to a different house. We used stretcher from the Red Cross to take the mother from the basement to the home of the Gense family on the Julianastraat, on the corner with the Concordiastraat. On our way back home we heard gun fire coming from very nearby. When Mr.

Vromans, Mr. Bootz and I entered our street we saw soldiers on the Akersteenweg coming from the University firing their riffles while retreating. At the same moment we also heard machine gun fire coming from the direction of the soccer field on the Akersteenweg just past the crossroads. Making sure nobody would see us, we crawled on all fours past the houses and into our home. Mr. v.d. Rijdt had a longer way to go than us. A few moments later there was a single German soldier, holding a bicycle with one hand, standing in front of our home. In his right hand he was holding a hand grenade and he focused on the Demertstraat. Two more German soldiers were standing a few feet in front of him watching the Heerderweg. Right now it was advisable to remain very quiet and in the basement. After all, one sudden move or sound and a hand grenade could be tossed into the basement and could kill us all. After that everything was quiet again. The sound of gun fire sounded further away in the general direction of the crossroads.
P.S. All the times I state in this diary could be inaccurate. All events could have happened before or after the stated times. My apologies for this.

Wednesday 13 September 1944 – 5:10 in the afternoon!

BOOM-BOOM-BOOM! Loud knocking on the door. "EVERYBODY COME OUTSIDE, THE AMERICANS ARE AT THE CROSSROADS". First all looks full of fear and doubt, then the relaxation. Indeed, many people are outside and knocking on doors to get others to come out of their basements. The women, still scared and emotional from last night's activities, still do not believe it all. "Please be careful", my wife said, "there could still be Germans in the vicinity and they could still shoot and kill you right before the liberation!" No way! No more shooting people! It is all real. We, the citizens of Heer, are "FREE". We were liberated by the American army, under leadership of General Hodges, the Old Hickory Division 30 (117th Infantry Regiment), as well as Maastricht.

Wednesday 13 September 1944 – 5:13 in the afternoon exactly.

The first American tank rattles by of the Akersteenweg in Heer moving in the direction of Maastricht. Hurray, hurray, hurray! We are free. "Long live the queen and long live the Americans". These are the first cries of freedom expressed by the residents in our neighborhood who are still shocked about last night's developments. Everybody is shaking hands and crying out of sheer happiness. "LIFE IS FAR TOO SHORT, SO DON'T WORRY ABOUT ANYTHING, WE GOT RID OF THOSE PRUSSIANS" is what you here everywhere. All the suffering from the last couple of days does not count anymore. Nobody thinks about this any longer. We, the residents of Heer, are now "FREE"!

After four years of exile, suppressed and subjugated by the Occupiers, our youth has been ruined, the elderly broken, hundreds killed in concentration camps or in

different ways. Now we are finally free. Let's hope that the rest of the Netherlands will be liberated from the German suppression soon as well.

---FREEDOM---

Obviously no sacrifices have been in vain no matter how heavy they weighed or are still weighing on hundreds of families in the Netherlands!!

EPILOGUE

We were supposed to have been liberated by the British troops. However as small unit of the American army advanced so rapidly that they arrived in Limburg about 16 hours earlier than planned. The large contingency arrived in Heer the next morning, Thursday 14 September. The above mentioned small unit, rather limited in numbers, came from the direction of Moulingen (Belgium), Noorbeek, Mesch and St. Geertruid on their way to Maastricht passing through Heer. They were not able to advance to Maastricht as the Germans had blown up both the bridges crossing the Maas river.

Strange and almost unexplainable how people, who lost just about everything they owned during last night's bombardment, are now outside jumping and screaming from joy. "EVERYWHERE THE ORANGE FLAGS ARE BEING RAISED". No idea where they all got them from. Even red-white-and-blue flags and flower bouquets are thrown onto the tanks and armored vehicles that drive on the Akersteenweg.
P.S. of this celebrated moment I have taken a couple of pictures. They did not all come out well. That was caused by the emotion of the moment and due to the fear of what happened the night before. BUT, THEY HAVE REMAINED VERY VALUABLE TO US EVER SINCE. For 35 years, as a memory of four years of war we had to deal with!! It reminds me of what a, at that time, very famous photographer write somewhere; " WHO TAKES PICTURES LIVES TWICE". That expression holds true else I, with the help of Mr. Bootz and Mr. v.d. Rijdt, could never have written this report.

The remainder of the evening of 13 September 1944 is very quiet. Tanks and other American vehicles and materials pass through. Followed by a rather small group of infantry and red cross soldiers. They laugh and shake hands while walking by. One can barely hear them while they walk in their rubber boots on their way to Maastricht. A little bit further in the direction of Wijk they stop. News arrives that they cannot cross the Maas river to Maastricht today. Later that evening the tanks return and take up their positions awaiting the arrival of

the main army that is expected to arrive early in the morning the next day. At 8:30 in the evening the police instructed us to leave the streets. We decided to all sleep downstairs in the basement as who knows! The German artillery could have their eyes set on us this time so it would be much safer to be downstairs! The night remains quiet. There were still some planes flying over but we were so used to that that this did not even wake us up!

THURSDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 1944

The advance of the American army, under command of General Hodges, originating from Elzas-Lotharingen in the neighborhood of Hagenau, has started. The men of the Light Blue Cross of Lorrain (double cross) are passing by us on their way to Maastricht. This is no longer a scary side for us! Motorized and fast moving vehicles, ahead of their time in 1944, move over the Akersteenweg on the way to Maastricht. Troops are moving complete bridge parts that will be assembled once they get to their location (due to the lack of film I was able to only take a few pictures of this event). What really stuck with me of this event: no screaming or yelling sergeants or commanders; one short whistles that appears to be understood by everyone and the entire American army unit starts to move (one can not distinguish the officers from the regular soldiers as they were dressed alike). The same goes for the tanks and their commanders who are taking a brief rest on the Akersteenweg. Also the M.P. (Military Police), wearing their white helmets, are doing their jobs like they have been doing this for years. They are standing on a platform that rotates and has a green and red light and are directing the passing traffic to the left, right, forward, and back and it makes you wonder how they keep track of everything. NO SCREAMING but everything moved along very well. During the afternoon of September 14th it is announced that we can expect more announcements. Can we expect another mobilization?

FRIDAY 15 SEPTEMBER 1944

A day of mourning in the municipality of Heer. The funeral of two victims who died during the bombardment of Heer. Never in the history of Heer did so many people participate in a funeral procession. During the funeral various gentlemen addressed the families. Our preacher, visibly moved, prayed for the people of Heer that passed away. Strictly for memory purposes I made some pictures of this funeral. R.I.P REQUIESCAT IN PACE!!

FRIDAY 15 SEPTEMBER 1944

A publication/request is posted on the announcement board at the town hall. Volunteers are wanted to perform guard duties. As I was familiar with the military administration of the 13th R.I. in Maastricht, I decided to sign up that afternoon at the former villa of Mr. Bosch in Scharn. There I met some

acquaintances from my time in the military and I was put to work at the headquarters of the Orde Dienst (O.D.) located at the Villa Bosch in Scharn. I bumped into my former Sergeant-Major van Rooij who I still knew from the 13th R.I. in Maastricht. Due to the fact that the American Commander for Maastricht and surroundings required continuous guarding of the ammunition and foods depot in Wijk-Maastricht, a guard unit was set up consisting mainly of former members of the military but includes some civilians as well.

The K.P. (Royal Patrol), better knows as the Fighting Squat, had already been established in Villa Wijckerveld, a former school, on the Meerssenerweg in Maastricht. They helped the Americans find and identify anyone who was part of the N.S.B. and Deutschfreundlich (friendly to the Germans) during the war and potentially arrest them. They were in charge of guarding the German prisoners of war as well.

SATURDAY 16 SEPTEMBER 1944

Allied planes fly over Heer. Everything else is quiet.

SUNDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 1944

A closed truck enters into the camp that is set up behind our house, in the field of the Brouwers family, and that is full of American soldiers and officers. In no time this truck is transformed into a beautiful altar. Everything moves fast and purposeful. The chaplain performs the mass. Under the presence and absolute silence amongst the soldiers the mass progresses calmly.

MONDAY 19 SEPTEMBER 1944

Additional heavy artillery, tanks, red-cross and ammunition vehicles etcetera, unbelievable amounts of rolling material, pass through Heer.

TUESDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 1944

His Highness Prince Bernard in Maastricht.

The newspaper “Mededeelingen” is published again. It mentions “Prince Bernard in Maastricht”. Wild enthusiasm, fanatic conversations on the Grote Markt in Maastricht, -also: Governor van Sonsbeek has resumed his governor duties, etc.

The next couple of days nothing noteworthy happens, we are now able to read all in our newspaper every day.

And with this ends my short story about the liberation of the Municipality of Heer (Limburg).

Thank God that we have all survived and experienced this!

The Maastrichter Staar can sing freely again! Dominum Salvam Fac Regunam Nostram.

To conclude I would like to give special thanks to all those who helped me compiling this report. And for now: don't complain, work!!!

Hopefully we will not start "freedom for more than one hundred years. (we will hope so).

L.H.G. WIJNANDS
Eisenhowerlaan 7
Beek, Limburg