



## **Victims of the Liberation: Dutch women and the Liberation of Netherlands**

“In Holland we are not supposed to talk about things like that, that is bad, that is the past and it has to be forgotten. What about me, do I have to be forgotten also?”

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31 July 2014

## **Table of Contents**

Introduction

Literature Report

Context

Chapter 1: The Initial Reception

Chapter 2: Relations Sour

Chapter 3: The Predicament Women Found Themselves in

Chapter 4: Children's Upbringing

Chapter 5: Search for Parents

Chapter 6: Reunification

Conclusion

Bibliography

## **Introduction**

During the Second World War the Netherlands was occupied by Nazi Germany until its liberation by the first Canadian army on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May, 1945. During the liberation and up until January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1946<sup>1</sup> when the last allied troops left Netherlands, sexual relations between the troops and young Dutch women was widespread and had a large number of consequences. Many young Dutch men become jealous of the troops, while lack of contraceptives led to the spread of STDs as well as the birth of illegitimate “liberation children”. Once the initial jubilation over the liberation had died down, resentment grew among the Dutch, who found themselves in a conundrum. On the one hand, they were grateful for their newfound independence, yet on the other hand their “liberators” were having a disrupting effect on Dutch society. Not wanting to appear ungrateful, criticism towards the troops was discouraged, and as a result Dutch women received the brunt of society's condemnation in the form of opinion pieces in local newspapers as well as songs such as “Trees heeft een Canadees”. Even after the Canadians had left these women continued to suffer, and those who had become pregnant as a result of these relations were often completely ostracized by both family and friends. In those times, being an unwed mother was a truly scandalous affair, and many attempted to keep their pregnancy secret for fear of becoming social pariahs. Under the pressure of family and the church, many placed their children in “homes”, while others gave them up for adoption. The “liberation children” faced a difficult childhood of bullying, while others were kept in the dark about who their true fathers were. These children found out about their Canadian fathers much later in life, in some cases at the deathbeds of their mothers. As a result, many of these children have attempted to contact their fathers with varying success, and for some the search still continues in the present times. Despite the social impact of these events, the topic has remained largely overlooked by both academia and the general public. By researching this topic, I hope to shed light on the social impact of these events, both during the liberation itself and in society today. More specifically, my research question will discuss: What was the social impact of sexual relations between Canadian soldiers and Dutch women during the liberation of the Netherlands during the Second World War?

In addition to my main research question, I also have a number of sub-research questions designed to elaborate on particular sub-topics at different time periods. My first sub-research question, for example 'How did Dutch Society respond to the “moral crisis” at the time?' deals with how the level of sexual relations between Canadian troops and young Dutch women created uproar in Dutch society.

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1 Paul Vroemen and Hen Bollen, *Canadezen in Actie* (Terra, 1994) 282

This ties into my second sub-research question on 'How were women who were having an affair treated?' which discusses how society looked down upon women who engaged in sexual relations. My third sub-research question 'How did Dutch society react to the birth of illegitimate liberation children?' discusses society's response to the liberation children, as well as the early childhood of those children. Finally, the last research question 'How the effects of sexual relations are during the liberation manifest in modern times?' is multilayered as it deal with a number of topics, including the liberation children's search for their Canadian fathers.

The social impact of sexual relations during the liberation can be seen across a number of different generations of Dutch society. Because of this, I will be approaching my topic from a chronological standpoint, discussing first the initial jubilation of the liberation and how the Canadian soldiers were hailed as heroes. Afterwards, I will discuss how relations soured, discussing the negative reaction in the press towards the Canadians as well as “moral panic” over the explosion in sexual relations. The next section will discuss how society treated those women who engaged in sexual relations, as well as what happened to those women who had become pregnant as result of those relations. Afterwards, I will focus on the lives of the illegitimate children who came to be known as “bevrijdingskinderen”, or liberation children. This section will be divided into two separate time periods, the first concerning their childhood, and the second their adult lives and their search for their Canadian fathers. The time period of my study will start at the beginning of the liberation on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 1945 up until the early childhood of the liberation children. The second time period will deal with the surge in attempts by liberation children to find their Canadian fathers. I will set the start of this time period at 1980, the year which project roots, an organization dedicated to reuniting Dutch children with their Canadian fathers, was founded. In addition, I will also spend some time discussing the context in which the liberation and these sexual relations took place, giving a brief and simplified overview of war time conditions in the Netherlands and the social setting in which my subject takes place.

In terms of how the information will be presented, I plan on presenting and analyzing a number of individual cases, and then using these to highlight and discuss the general trends and themes which I have encountered. The majority of these cases come from the works of Mrs. Olga Rains, a war bride living in Canada and one of the founders of Project Roots, an organization dedicated to helping reunify liberation children with their Canadian fathers. She has interviewed a great deal of liberation children and women who engaged in sexual relations with Canadian soldiers during the liberation, the results of which are collected in three of her books. Because the information is presented as is without any alterations, I have been able to use them as primary sources. I will also be using a number of publications and primary material from both the Royal Library in The Hague as well as NIOD in

Amsterdam. The nature of the sources there, as well as other sources I will be using, are further discussed in my literature report. In addition, my research will also involve examining the variety and content of Dutch literature available on the liberation of the Netherlands in order to determine how much of a historical gap there is my research topic. This information, or lack thereof, will be used to highlight the lasting impact of the liberation on modern Dutch society, and how the topic of liberation children and how women were treated during the liberation have become taboo.

## Literature Report

On a general note, the first thing I noticed upon reading available literature on the liberation of the Netherlands is how the lasting social impact of the events can be seen in the manner in which the event is covered. Depending on the nationality of the author, the tone and presentation of events can differ quite dramatically. When examining Dutch sources we find a large amount of commemorative literature meant to remember the war and pay tribute to the Canadian troops who fought for the Netherlands' independence. In terms of social contact, they tend to only focus on the positive aspects of interaction, such as how the soldiers were joyfully greeted and gave out gifts to the locals such as chocolate and cigarettes. These books exhibit a general trend among Dutch authors who seem to idolize the Canadians and hold them in a sort of reverence. For example in *Maple Leaf Up*<sup>2</sup> by Dutch author M. Huizinga, an English summary is included at the end of the book which pays tribute to the fallen.

“It is hoped that this book will be read by many, and that, when Canada is mentioned, their thoughts will turn to the days of the Liberation. The Liberation though which the Canadians have done so much for our welfare. We must never forget. Maple Leaf Up!”<sup>3</sup>

Similar sentiments can be found in other books such as *The Canadian Sacrifice*<sup>4</sup> and *Mijn Bevrijding: Herinneringen van ooggetuigen van de bevrijding*<sup>5</sup>, which were created specifically for commemoration of the war. By focusing only on the positive elements of the liberation and ignoring the problems associated with sexual relations, they have effectively removed these aspects from the dominant discourse. In addition, the popularity of this subject among Dutch authors in itself can be used for my research, and is indicative of the lasting positive impression the Canadian's made in the Netherlands.

Only two Dutch sources I found listed in libraries and online databases offered me substantial information on the negative perceptions of Canadian soldiers and has also proven to be the most informative source on the liberation I have come across. The first of these is *De Nederlands pers over de omgang van vrouwen met Canadezen in de zomer van 1945*, by Herman de Liagre Böhl<sup>6</sup>. A well-

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2 M. H. Huizinga, *Maple Leaf Up!* (Groningen: J. Niemeije, 1980)

3 Huizinga, *Maple Leaf Up!*, 270.

4 Bevrijdingsmuseum, *The Canadian Sacrifice* (Nijmegen : Brakkenstein), 1990

5 Ivo Niehe, *Mijn Bevrijding: Herinneringen van ooggetuigen van de bevrijding* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 1995)

6 Herman de Liagre Böhl, “De Nederlands pers over de omgang van vrouwen met Canadezen in de zomer van 1945”. *De Gids* 148 (1985)

cited analysis of media coverage on sexual relations between Canadian soldiers and Dutch women during the liberation, the article provides a detailed look at how Dutch society reacted to the situation. The article discusses how the media's attitude towards Canadian sexual behaviour was somewhat tolerant at first, and a sort of "boys will be boys" attitude was adopted. As Dutch society became worried about the increasing levels of sexual activity and repercussions thereof, the media adopted a more critical stance, chastising both soldiers and women for their immoral behaviour. This drew complaints from the Canadian military, and in response the media stopped publishing criticisms of their behaviour. As a result women bore the brunt of the blame, and much of Böhl's article discusses how the various newspapers approached the issue. In addition to the reaction in the media, Böhl also discusses some of the social consequences, such as how a curfew was put in place for young women, and any women under the age of 21 caught fraternizing with Canadian troops could be taken down to the police station for questioning. An invaluable source, Böhl's analysis offers some insight into society's reaction to the outbreak of sexual relations, as well as to why Canadian soldiers were exempt from criticisms.

The second source which covers sexual relation during the liberation is *Canadezen in Actie*<sup>7</sup>, by Paul Vroemen and Hen Bollen. Their book provides extensive information on all aspects of the war as well as the year long period after the liberation when the Canadian soldiers remained in the country. In particular they offer a great amount of detail on interactions between civilians and soldiers, including the less discussed negative aspects such as the spread of STDs, pregnancy and abandonment, and resentment towards the soldiers in the Dutch press. I was also able to consult a number of the primary sources they have cited which are available online and at the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, including Dutch newspaper publications from the years 1945 and 1946. Other sources they have used, such as the wartime journals published by the Canadian military, are sadly only available in Canada itself. I was however, able to find references to these negative perceptions of Canadian soldiers in multiple sources by Canadian authors. In "*Where are Our Liberators?*" *The Canadian Liberation of West Brabant, 1944* by Canadian professor Geoffrey Hayes, it is noted that the Dutch resented Canadian soldiers for taking "advantage of the shortage of Dutch men to court Dutch women"<sup>9</sup>. He also makes reference to a journal article on the subject of the negative relations between soldiers and citizen written by Michiel Horn, who notes that despite some problems, "On the whole relations between soldiers and civilians

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7 Vroemen and Bollen, *Canadezen in Actie*.

8 Geoffrey Hayes, "Where are our Liberators?" *The Canadian Liberation of West Brabant, 1944* *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* XVI ii (1995) Accessed January 27, 2013.  
<[http://www.caansacaen.ca/Journal/issues\\_online/Issue\\_XVI\\_ii\\_1995/HAYES.pdf](http://www.caansacaen.ca/Journal/issues_online/Issue_XVI_ii_1995/HAYES.pdf) >

9 Hayes, "Where are our Liberators?", 61.

were remarkably good”<sup>10</sup>. Unfortunately, the article which he references, *More than Cigarettes, Sex, and Chocolate: the Canadian Army in the Netherlands 1944-45*<sup>11</sup> is more than the literature review time limit of thirty years old and regardless, I am unable to find a copy. In any case, I was able to find references to these same problems in *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers*<sup>12</sup> by Canadian author Jeffrey Keshen, who takes a critical look at the conduct of Canadian soldiers, noting that “Some Dutch accused the Canadians of exploiting their desperation as they would an enemy, using cigarettes, food, fuel ... to drive hard bargains to obtain items such as family jewellery”<sup>13</sup>. Still, despite these criticisms he offers that the Dutch held a “widely and deeply felt”<sup>14</sup> gratitude towards their liberators, so there seems to be an overall consensus between scholars that the soldiers were generally held in high regard. While there isn't necessarily a historical debate on this issue, a number of scholars focus solely on the image of Canadian soldiers as liberators, and by disregarding the negative side of the issue present a somewhat idealistic image. Whether this is a wilful omission or there is simply a lack of primary sources and awareness of the negative side of Netherlands’ “liberators” is unclear. What we do find however, is that Canadian scholars tend to be more willing to adopt a critical attitude towards troop conduct than their Dutch counterparts. Perhaps this line between scholars from the two nations is indicative of the lasting effect of the liberation, with gratitude acting as a discouraging factor for Dutch scholars from delving into the negative aspects of their liberators. Pressure from society may have been the cause of this skewed perception, as we know that during the liberation itself, criticizing allied troops was highly discouraged and even outright banned for a short amount of time. Regardless of the reasoning behind it, this selective recollection of the past presents us with an idealistic portrayal of events, which is the one being actively reinforced during commemorations of the war in the Netherlands.

## **Liberation Children**

Unfortunately, little is written about the plight of those Dutch women who were left alone to fend for themselves after becoming pregnant. Academic literature on the topic seems to be non-existent, and no journal articles are listed on the various online databases I have searched (such as Jstor, Google scholar, and project muse). Outside of academic literature the topic has received slightly more interest, however these sources are neither peer-reviewed. One book in particular that I came across

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10 Hayes, “Where are our Liberators?”, 61.

11 Michiel Hom, "More than Cigarettes, Sex and Chocolate: the Canadian Army in the Netherlands, 1944-1945," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes* 16:3,4 (Fall, Winter, 1981)

12 Jeffrey A. Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers: Canada's Second World War*. (Vancouver: UBC, 2004)

13 Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers* 254.

14 Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers* 253.



covers the topic thoroughly. “Trees krijgt een Canadees”<sup>15</sup> by Bonnie Okkema covers the complex situation that roughly 5,000 half-Canadian children faced after the war, growing up unwanted by their father and often by their mothers as well. In addition the book also covers the wider implications of their situation, and how many of them attempted to contact their fathers. The consequences of these relations are not only restricted to scholarly sources but can also be seen in the social and cultural sphere. I found an article about the subject in a Canadian Newspaper, noting that during a celebration of the liberation of the Netherlands in Amsterdam in 1999, a number of people held signs saying “I’m looking for my dad” and “Are you my dad?”<sup>16</sup>.

Bonnie Okkema studies in great detail the circumstances which led to the birth of so many “bevrijdingskinderen” and the consequences thereof. A thorough study, she covers all aspects of the topic from the liberation itself until modern times, using accounts from roughly 40 “bevrijdingskinderen” as well as a number of their mothers<sup>17</sup>. The book starts off with discussing how initial jubilation over the liberation had led to the high rate of sexual relations between Dutch women and Canadian soldiers, and how this led to a slew of problems and resentment. Okkema then discusses the situation those women who had become pregnant found themselves in, noting that society at the time was particularly harsh to single mothers. Many of them had to give up their children for adoption, while others were thrown out of the house, and some considered abortion or even suicide. The common feature among all of them was how they were ostracized by society, which was quick to judge them. By interviewing a large amount of these women and discussing their experiences, Okkema shows that these sentiments were carried over to the children of these women who were teased and bullied constantly. Many of them discovered that their fathers were Canadian soldiers when people insulted them, calling them 'onecht' or bastards. In addition the relationship between mother and child was also strained by these sentiments, with some mothers resenting and even blaming their children for the harsh situation they found themselves in. She discusses the emotional and psychological toll this treatment had on both the mothers and children, noting that for the most part the manner in which they were treated was largely indistinguishable from how those women who had relations with Germans were treated after the occupation. This is an interesting comparison that warrants further research of my own, for those women who were viewed as collaborators were treated very harshly after the war. Finally, the last chapters of the book cover how the “bevrijdingskinderen” searched for their fathers, and in those

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15 Bonnie Okkema. *Trees krijgt een Canadees*. (Zutphen: Walberg Pres, 2012)

16 J. Marshall, “When daddy went marching home: Canadian war veterans left an estimated 30,000 children behind in Europe. Now some of those children are searching for their families”. *National Post*. (Ontario: 19 April 1999) Accessed January 25, 2013. <<http://search.proquest.com/docview/329386016?accountid=13598>>

17 Okkema, *Trees krijgt een Canadees*, 7.

cases when they found them, how they were received by them. In some cases reaction was positive, with on one occasion the 90 year old father stating that 'De jaren die ik nog krijg, zijn voor jou'<sup>18</sup>. In other cases the father had already passed away, however the children were received with open arms by their newly discovered Canadian family. Unfortunately for others, their search ended when the Canadian authorities rejected their requests to be put in contact with their fathers, who had personally requested that this be denied. Not to be deterred, some "bevrijdingskinderen" have gone to Canada to search for their father, some of them taking their families and making a vacation out of it<sup>19</sup>. Even now this search is an ongoing activity, with many children now in their late sixties continuing their search for their fathers who may have already passed away.

Another author who has extensively covered the issues of both war brides and "bevrijdingskinderen" is Olga Rains, who has written a number of on the topic in both Dutch and English. A war bride who immigrated to Canada, she later wrote a number of books about both war brides and liberation children. These books are *We Became Canadians*, *Children of the Liberation* (also known as *Zij Die Achterbleven*), and *Summer of '46*, all of which are available at the Koninkelijk Bibliotheek in Den Haag. *We Became Canadians* documents the stories of war brides, discussing the circumstances which lead to them emigrating to Canada and how they were able to adjust to living in a foreign country for the first time. Her books are an invaluable tool for my research as the information she has collected is largely presented as is, with no real analysis or editing except for compiling stories which follow a similar theme. The numerous stories she has collected from interviews with war brides and liberation children are often translated from Dutch to English, but are otherwise original materials which I plan on analyzing as primary sources. Besides from the stories she has collected, Rains' opinions are in themselves useful, considering that she speaks from a firsthand experience. In addition, Olga Rains was a founding member of Project Roots, an organization founded in 1980<sup>20</sup> dedicated to reuniting liberation child with their Canadian fathers.

Her other book, *Zij Die Achterbleven* documents the stories of more than fifty liberation children and how they have attempted to regain contact with their Canadian Fathers. Their stories are a testament to the long lasting social impact of sexual relations during the liberation, and will be explored in my thesis. The book is actually very similar to *Trees Krijgt een Canadees*; however the information is not presented in interview format. Another one of her books, *Summer of '46*, covers the same topics, and notes how not only were liberation children looking for their fathers in Canada, but in

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18 Okkema, *Trees krijgt een Canadees*, 169.

19 Okkema, *Trees krijgt een Canadees*, 190.

20 Olga Rains, *Summer of '46* (Ontario: Overnight Copy Service, 1992), 4.

some cases veterans were also looking for them. She notes that upon finding out about their children, some soldiers attempted to contact them but this was denied by their Dutch family, who told them “Forget it; it is not your problem”<sup>21</sup>. In some cases parents even hid letters from their daughters, effectively silencing communication and leaving the soldiers completely oblivious to the fact that they now had a child in the Netherlands. These soldiers only found out about their children when they heard about stories of liberation children reuniting with their long lost fathers in the news, and decided to investigate to see if they also may have left some young Dutch girl pregnant after the war. Olga Rains has facilitated these searches and reunifications through her project “ROOTS”, and so far they have managed to help reunite over 600 fathers and liberation children<sup>22</sup>. Besides from her own works, Olga Rain's is also a featured author in the collection *Voices of the Left Behind: Project Roots and the Canadian War Children of World War II*, where she discusses a number of different stories of women who had sexual relations with Canadian soldiers, and the children they gave birth to. The book is similar to *Trees Krijgt Een Canadees*, and is a collection of stories from liberation children, although it differs slightly as it is not exclusively about Dutch children.

In addition to the works of Olga Rains, the firsthand accounts of liberation children can also be found in the newsletters of the Association of Liberation Children at the Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD) in Amsterdam. A group which worked closely with Mrs. Rains, the association is dedicated to helping liberation children become reunited with their Canadian fathers. On their website <<http://www.liberationchildrenandwarbabies.org/>> some useful information has also been given, such as the estimated amount of liberation children and how many of them have been successfully reunited with their parents. In addition the website continues to operate as a message board where people can post requests for information about their fathers, and is a testament to how sexual relations during the liberation continues to have an impact in modern times.

### **The social effect of sexual relations during wartime**

Sonia Rose discusses sexual relation between British girls and American soldiers stationed on the island. Just like in Dutch case, society was concerned about the morality of these sexual relations and the inevitable birth of illegitimate children. Rose concentrates on the nature of what morality is, discussing moral discourse from a philosophical perspective. She notes that infatuation with soldiers, or at least society's fear of this, have been recurring throughout multiple wars and countries. For example

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21 Rains, *Summer of '46*, 4.

22 Rains, *Summer of '46*, 4.

during World War I girls who associated with soldiers were known to have “khaki fever”<sup>23</sup>, a term coined after the color of the soldiers uniforms. Rose points to philosopher Richard Rorty who defines society's perception of morality as “the sort of thing *we* don’t do... if done by one of us, or if done repeatedly by one of us, that person ceases to be one of us”<sup>24</sup>. In other words, by performing an act deemed to be immoral, such as sex out of wedlock, a member of society ceases to be seen as part of the group and is effectively cast out. In problematic times this moral discourse becomes intensified, which explains why society became so involved in the policing of moral values during the liberation with the creation of moral committees. Rorty notes that wartime also highlights the importance of the nation state, and as such moral transgressions have a larger impact of society as a whole, affecting the character of the nation-state. From this Rose surmises that “women who were perceived to be seeking out sexual adventures might well be defined as subversive”<sup>25</sup>. While the article deals with wartime Britain, this perception can easily be applied to the Dutch case, where single mothers with illegitimate children were commonly ostracized by both family and society. In addition it shows us that the moral dilemma about sexual relations between soldiers and women was by no means confined to the Netherlands or even the Second World War, but is a recurring theme for countries at war.

An interesting point that the article makes is that the arrival of American troops in England triggered a widespread fear of increasing “moral laxity” among women, even though in actuality sexual behaviors among young women had not significantly changed. This anxiety stemmed more from the fact that now British women were engaging in relations with foreign troops rather than their own national soldiers. Rose points out that these fears were largely created by the sense of lost national pride over the fact that the Americans had “come to their rescue”, and the idea that British women were engaging in relations while their troops were fighting abroad<sup>26</sup>. Similar sentiments are seen in the Dutch case, where worries about increased sexual relations were heightened by jealousy and resentment among Dutch men, who felt that their women were being stolen. Resentment was heightened by parties organized for the Canadian soldiers where only Dutch women were able to attend.

The social disturbances discussed by Rose are also discussed in *Building Liberty: Canada and World Peace, 1945-2005*, a collection of writings on Canada's military operation and place in international relations since the Second World War. It contains a chapter written by Doeko Bosscher which focuses on the consequences of sexual relations during the liberation of the Netherlands.

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23 Sonia Rose. "Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation in World War II Britain." *The American Historical Review* 103.4 (1998), 1147.

24 Rose, "Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation in World War II Britain.", 1148

25 Rose, "Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation in World War II Britain.", 1149

26 Conny Steenman-Marcusse, and Aritha van Herk. *Building Liberty: Canada and World Peace, 1945-2005* (Groningen: Barkhuis Pub., 2005), 151

Bosscher details society's fears and reactions in Groningen, where the local populace was so concerned about potential illegitimate children that they created a number of social committee's to curb sexual relations and police young Dutch women. In addition, the source provides figures for my research, such as noting that of the 7,000 "liberation children" born in 1946, roughly 25 percent were born to British and Polish forces, the other 75 percent to Canadians<sup>27</sup>. The problem with this source however, is that while it appears to be an academic writing, not all of its figures are cited, and as such I will refrain from using that information.

In addition, the source is unique in the sense that it also details how the Canadians themselves reacted to criticisms of their behavior. Bosscher notes how in the *Bay News*, the troop journal of the Cape Breton Highlanders infantry regiment, an article suggested hosting a party for children would help reduce "hard feelings between us and some of the local citizens"<sup>28</sup>. Another example is how the Groningen chapter of the 'Entertainment Committee of the Netherlands' made a point of inviting Dutch males along with females, so strong was the resentment caused by only inviting Dutch women. Bosscher also discusses an article printed in the journal of the Perth Regiment, *The Perthonian*, by a Dutch Pastor imploring the soldiers to behave themselves. A useful primary source, this can be used as an indication of how serious the social impact of sexual relations were during the liberation. As well researched as the article is into the more suspect activities of Canadian soldiers, Bosscher exhibits the same prevalent tendency among Dutch authors to hold Canadian troops in a sort of reverence. In the introduction to his text, he apologizes for shedding a negative light on their activities, stating

"I will also share with you some facts which never made a big difference as far as Dutch respect for Canadians went but which detracted from their stature as the most noble and decent men who would do nothing but give their best for our freedom. As it turns out, even Canadians could be confused by the chaos of war and a vacuum of authority, with odious behavior as a result"<sup>29</sup>

Texts such as this will allow me to show me the lasting impact the Canadian troops had, while in contrast sympathies for the plight of single Dutch mothers is much less prevalent among Dutch historians.

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27 Steenman-Marcusse and van Herk, *Building Liberty*, 170

28 Steenman-Marcusse and van Herk, *Building Liberty*, 178

29 Steenman-Marcusse and van Herk, *Building Liberty*, 163

## Context

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of May, 1940, Germany invaded Netherlands and within 5 days the Dutch military surrendered. In the aftermath, Netherlands submitted to German rule and the Dutch government and Royal family fled the country. The occupation was a difficult time for the Dutch, who were subjected to forced labor and restriction on both their lifestyles as well as general supplies. In 1944 Allied forces made headway into Europe, and Dutch laborers went on strike in order to disrupt German supply lines. In retaliation the Germans punished the country by restricting the supply of food to the West of the Netherlands which they still occupied, resulting in the “Hunger Winter” of 1944-1945. Many people starved to death, and the average person suffered weight loss of about 40 pounds<sup>30</sup>. As the Allied forces advanced into occupied Netherlands, one of their primary objectives was to reestablish supply lines and bring food to the starving population. To this end “Operation Manna” was conducted, whereby negotiations were made with the German forces for food to be airlifted into occupied Netherlands without restrictions<sup>31</sup>. When the brunt of Allied forces were redirected towards Germany, the First Canadian Army was tasked with liberating the rest of the country. They made quick headway, and on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May, now known as Liberation Day, German forces surrender. After the liberation, Netherlands continued to be used as a rest centre for Canadian troops, who remained in the country until February 1946. By the time the last soldiers had left in 1946, over 100,000 Canadians had been in the country<sup>32</sup>.

Initially a largely conservative society in which sexual relations outside of marriage were highly discouraged, years of occupation had created a sharp transformation. The pressures of the war had loosened sexual inhibitions, particularly among those directly involved in the resistance, though at the time this was somewhat tolerated due to the circumstances. In addition the wartime struggles against the German occupiers had created a culture of resistance, in which non-cooperation, resistance to authority, and sloth was encouraged. Once the war had ended, the older generation sought to get rid of these negative characteristics which had carried over into peacetime. In addition, years of curfews and

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30 Paul Vroemen and Hen Bollen. *Canadezen in Actie*. (Terra, 1994) 268

31 Mark Zuehlke, *On to Victory: The Canadian Liberation of The Netherlands, March 23 – May 5, 1945* (Vancouver : Douglas & McIntyre, 2010)

32 Okkema, *Trees krijgt een Canadees*, 70.

lack of basic luxury goods had been monotonous for people, and the liberation had created a sudden rapid change of pace in people's daily lives.

Before the arrival of the Canadians, the average Dutch citizen knew little about Canada; however what they did know was largely positive. After the German invasion at the outbreak of the war, Princess Juliana fled to Canada where she took up residence in the capital. During her stay in Ottawa, she gave birth to Princess Margriet, a complicated affair due to the fact that by being born in Canada she would gain dual citizenship, which would remove her from the Dutch royal line of succession. Fortunately the Canadian parliament made a special that Princess Juliana's hospital suite would be considered "extraterritorial"<sup>33</sup>, and this event was published in Dutch underground newspapers. The Canadians were even better known for airdropping food and supplies into occupied territories under "Operation Manna"<sup>34</sup>, cementing their reputation as liberators before they had even arrived. As such, the Dutch awaited the arrival of the Canadians with a great deal of anticipation, not only because it meant that they would finally become independent again, but also because they wanted to greet their "liberators".

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33 Horace Franks, *A Princess is born, January 19, 1943: being the chronological and descriptive story of the preparations, birth, and subsequent activities and reactions connected with the birth of a daughter to H.R.H. Princess Juliana of the Netherlands* (London: Netherlands Press Agency, 1943), 8-9

34 "Food for Dutch Flown Behind German Lines." *The Globe and Mail*, April 30, 1945. Accessed 18 December 2013, <<http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.mta.ca/docview/1326009636?accountid=12599>>

## **Chapter 1: Initial Reception**

Canadian troops first entered the South of Netherlands on October 1944, were they were naturally greeted with a great amount of excitement and jubilation. The war had taken its toll on Dutch society, and needless to say by the time the Canadians entered Netherlands, they were ready for freedom. One enthusiastic young woman remembers the day that her village was liberated:

“When the Canadian soldiers entered our village, everyone had been out to meet them with flowers and waving flags, to show the soldiers how happy we were. Wearing my wooden shoes, looking pale and thin, I was dressed with red and blue stripes that I had made from an old bed sheet. Timidly, I looked at the soldiers.”<sup>35</sup>

An interesting account, it highlights the excitement among the local populace, as well as noting how impoverished the Dutch were. One of the first things people would have noticed about the liberators was that in terms of physical fitness, they stood in stark contrast to the local Dutch men. The hunger winter had left most of the population malnourished, while the Canadians were on average, both in physically good shape, as well as being well fed and young. As such they would have been an impressive sight to behold. One woman who engaged in relations with one of the soldiers notes how “It felt so good being held by this handsome young soldier. He looked strong and healthy compared to myself, because I was skinny and weak from the lack of good food for so long.”<sup>36</sup> Physical health aside, they would have also been young and sharply dressed in uniform while many of the Dutch women wore tattered or makeshift clothing, such as in the earlier example where the girl’s wears clothing made from “an old bed sheet”.

On a basic level, it is understandable that Dutch women would be attracted to the young, healthy men in uniform, especially considering the excitement about the liberation. At the same time, the conservative values of Dutch society had also been eroded by wartime conditions, reducing the inhibitions which may have previously prevented them from doing so. War had undermined parental

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35 Rains, *Summer of '46*, 6.

36 Rains, *Summer of '46*, 8.



authority, and distorted notions of what was morally acceptable. During the occupation, a large amount of able bodied men had been shipped off to labor camps or went into hiding, and as a result women had taken on the role of provider, often walking for miles in search of food. With this came a newfound notion of independence, which did not simply disappear once the crisis was over and men had returned. In addition, pre-marital sex among resistance fighters had been common, yet was largely tolerated due to the desperate nature of the struggle. In addition, the supply of Dutch men was somewhat small, with so many of those who were physically fit having been shipped off to German labor camps, and were unable to return until the Allies moved into Germany. With the war lasting 5 years, many Dutch girls become women during the occupation, and for many of them this was the first time they would have any sort of relation with men.

Freedom was not the only thing that the Canadians brought with them; they also brought gifts, the most common being chocolate and cigarettes. People would clamor to receive these presents which helped create a sort of magical aura about the Canadians. Wartime rationing and restrictions on luxury goods meant that for some, this would be the first time they had ever tasted chocolate. In some cases, parents would actually encourage their children to socialize with the soldiers in order to acquire these goods, and were eager to have soldiers visit them at home. The Dutch government encouraged people to provide for the troops, and many troops stayed in their homes before more permanent accommodation could be set up. This of course, allowed for easier socializing between troops and young daughters, and often led to romantic relations.

Despite all the excitement, parents were still wary of the potential repercussions of allowing their daughters to socialize with the soldiers, though they usually either gave in to their daughter's incessant pleading. In some cases their daughters snuck off anyway at night to attend dances, even though they were strictly forbidden. Initially, relations between Canadian's and Dutch women were actually facilitated by the Dutch, who created the Entertainment Committee of the Netherlands to create recreational activities for the troops<sup>37</sup>. Bars, Movie Theatres, and other entertainment venues were often booked exclusively for Canadians, which led to some resentment among the Dutch. This was especially true during dancing nights, which only Dutch women were allowed to attend

I have included this firsthand account because it embodies the typical manner in which a relationship between a Canadian soldier and young Dutch women occurred.

“Our village was liberated in 1944 and everybody was happy of course. I was nineteen and a farmer's daughter, the eldest of seven children. We had a big farm and all through the War we had German soldiers in the barn and storage sheds. Later the

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37      Vroemen and Bollen, *Canadezen in Actie*, 269.

Canadians and English were there. All during the War it had been hard work and nothing else for me. Now there were dances and entertainment, but I had very strict parents and was not allowed to go anywhere. After much talking and crying they finally gave in and I could go to one dance in the village. That night I fell in love with a Canadian soldier.”<sup>38</sup>

This romance resulted in her first sexual experience, and unfortunately for the young lady in question, also resulted in pregnancy. Relations were blooming all over the Netherlands, and while they varied from case to case, most of them occurred in a similar fashion to the example I have given. Naive and romantic, young Dutch women often thought that they were getting into long lasting relationships, when in reality the Canadian soldiers had no such plans. Unfortunately for these women, they would never hear from the soldiers again, who despite promises ceased to correspond or simply gave them false addresses. In many cases these soldiers already had wives or sweethearts back home, and never intended on having anything more than a casual fling. Still, this isn't to say that all of these women were deceived; some soldiers truly wished to maintain relations, however with the complications of war were unable to do so. In a relatively small number of cases, the soldier proposed and after marriage the wife would leave to Canada. These “war brides” are an interesting case, and I will cover them in further detail in a later chapter.

It should be taken into consideration that not all women who engaged in sexual relation were naïve young women who imagined that their sweetie would take them back to Canada. Casual sex was also a normal occurrence, with one night stands happening all over the country where both participants had no illusions about what they were getting into. Indeed, it was actually a common misconception among the conservative members of Dutch society that women were not engaging in sexual relations for pleasure, but because that they were either misguided or tricked into it by Canadian soldiers. Many of these women knew that they would most likely never see their lovers again, and accepted the situation for what it was. In addition, an incredible amount of people got divorced in 1945, and while no exact numbers exist, according to Doeko Bosscher a large number of these marriages were disrupted by relations between wives and allied soldiers.<sup>39</sup> Incidents such as these began to shine a negative light upon the liberators, who started to gain a reputation for themselves as womanizers. Once the Netherlands had been completely liberated by Allied forces, the Dutch began to grow impatient with their visitors who were increasingly perceived as having overstayed their welcome.

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38 Rains, *Children of the Liberation*, 14.

39 Steenman-Marcusse and van Herk, *Building Liberty*, 173.

## **Chapter 2: Relations Sour**

After the initial merriment surrounding the liberation, relations between locals and allied troops soured relatively quickly. While in general the troops continued to be well received throughout their stay, relations were strained largely by the negative consequences of sexual relations. Unprotected sex had led to a spread in STDs, while Dutch men had begun to resent Canadian soldiers for, as Geoffrey Hayes puts it, taking “advantage of the shortage of Dutch men to court Dutch women”<sup>40</sup>.

The Dutch response can be seen in both the creation of numerous moral committees and outrage in local newspapers once the restriction on criticizing foreign troops had been lifted. Vroemen and Bollen describe how there was a “moral panic” in Netherlands over the situation, with the media becoming more and more hostile from August 1945 onwards<sup>41</sup>. The idea of a “moral panic” is also discussed by Herman de Liagre Böhl, who states that the concept may originate from a publication in a local newspaper printed right after the liberation which quotes the purported opinion of a Canadian officer who stated that:

“The Dutch men are good-for-nothings, who don't work, but instead spend the whole day loitering about on the street; the Dutch women act like hussies and the Dutch children are beggars.”<sup>42</sup>

Whether or not the officer said these words is unknown, however it contributed to the idea that the national character of the country was at risk. This in turn, resulted in the creation of aforementioned moral committees. In Groningen for example, the “Committee for moral recovery” and the “Groningen Kring” were created, which called for women to not degrade themselves or bring shame to the Canadians.<sup>43</sup> In Rotterdam, the chief of morality police was quoted in a local newspaper, warning people of the dangers of socializing with the troops, noting that “een Canadees neemt geen genoegen

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40 Hayes, “Where are our Liberators?”, 61.

41 Vroemen and Bollen, *Canadezen in Actie*, 275.

42 de Liagre Böhl, “Canadezen in de zomer van 1945”, 243.

43 Steenman-Marcusse and van Herk, *Building Liberty*, 170.

met een kopje thee en een gezellig avondje!”<sup>44</sup> Sentiments like this were common. In another newspaper, one man comments that:

“The naked truth is this: our girls and women are acting like prostitutes. In about a year we will have a great many 'illegitimate' children and full hospitals. The moral deterioration grows by the day.”<sup>45</sup>

Throughout these criticisms, Dutch women bore the brunt of the blame. One of the reasons for this was that the Dutch were afraid of coming off as ungrateful, and as such were hesitant of being overcritical of their liberators. In addition, during the early period of the liberation, the government forbade any publication of criticisms toward allied troops. As for why the Dutch were so harsh on their own women, the reasons are more complicated. First of all, they were simply an easier target for people to vent their frustrations on. At the time, a woman's social standing was far less than that of a man, and as such their actions came under far greater scrutiny from the rest of society. More importantly however, was that the general sentiment seemed to be that by shaming themselves through their actions, they brought shame to the “national character” of the country.

This idea of “national character” has been explored by Sonia Rose in her article “Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation in World War II Britain”<sup>46</sup>, where she discusses the social implication of sexual relations between American troops and British women during the second world war. In the British case, sexual relation between soldiers and women were common, however opposition only became fervent with the arrival of foreign troops. This is similar to the Dutch case, where casual sex among resistance fighters was often tolerated due to the dire circumstances they often found themselves in. In both cases, the foreign element is what really creates the onset of moral panic, and as such it can surmised that only once members of another nation become involved does the issue of sexual relations becomes one of national importance. Rose points to philosopher Richard Rorty who defines society's perception of morality as “the sort of thing *we* don't do... if done by one of us, or if done repeatedly by one of us, that person ceases to be one of us”<sup>47</sup> In problematic times this moral discourse becomes intensified, which explains why society took such an active role in the policing of moral values. Rorty notes that wartime also highlights the importance of the nation state, and as such moral transgressions have a larger impact of society as a whole, affecting the character of the nation-state. From this Rose surmises that “women who were perceived to be seeking out sexual adventures might well be defined

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44 Vroemen and Bollen, *Canadezen in Actie*, 275.

45 Vroemen and Bollen, *Canadezen in Actie*, 275.

46 Rose, "Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation in World War II Britain."

47 Rose, "Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation in World War II Britain.", 1148.

as subversive”<sup>48</sup>. In addition it shows us that the moral dilemma about sexual relations between soldiers and women was by no means confined to the Netherlands or even the Second World War, but is a recurring theme for countries at war.

Anger and resentment against the Canadians continued to grow, eventually resulting in violence. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of September<sup>49</sup>, jealousy of the Canadian soldiers' romantic success with Dutch women culminated in a huge brawl on the streets of Utrecht. The fight began when a group of Dutch men began yelling at some Dutch girls who were fraternizing with some Canadian troops. The Canadian's defended the girls and the argument quickly escalated into a fight reputedly involving over 200 soldiers and an unknown amount of Dutch men<sup>50</sup>. Bricks were thrown, knives were used, and on the Canadian side guns were fired, yet remarkably no-one was killed or severely wounded. The day after the fight, the military police kicked the majority of the troops out of the city. As a result of this incident, criticism of the Canadian troops in the press intensified.

This criticism of their behavior and the impact of sexual relations did not go unnoticed by the Canadians, who took measures to alleviate the situation. The *Bay News* of the Cape Breton Highlanders suggested hosting a party for children would help reduce “hard feelings between us and some of the local citizens”<sup>51</sup>. In addition, the Groningen chapter of the 'Entertainment Committee of the Netherlands made a point of inviting Dutch males along with females to the dances they organized. Previously only Dutch females had been allowed, and it had become a long standing point of resentment among Dutch men<sup>52</sup>. Cooperation with the Dutch can also be seen by how *The Perthonian*, a journal made for the Canadian Perth Regiment, published a letter from a Dutch Pastor. In the article, he voiced his concerns:

“We must speak plainly and say the truth. When you came you were heartily welcome. We hailed you as our liberators. You are still welcome and we shall [never] forget what you did for us. If ever we forget we are not worthy of our freedom. But as weeks and months go on there may come frictions. Young men become jealous because you dance with their girls, mothers become anxious about their daughters—by the way, you will take care of our girls? They are as dear to us as your sisters and friends are to you.”<sup>53</sup>

The situation became so dire that on 10 October 1945, Lt. General Guy Simonds called a press

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48 Rose, "Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation in World War II Britain.", 1149.

49 de Liagre Böhl, “Canadezen in de zomer van 1945”, 247.

50 de Liagre Böhl, “Canadezen in de zomer van 1945”, 247.

51 Steenman-Marcusse and van Herk, *Building Liberty*, 178.

52 Steenman-Marcusse and van Herk, *Building Liberty*, 174.

53 Steenman-Marcusse and van Herk, *Building Liberty*, 178-179.

conference where he defended the behavior of Canadian troops, noting that based on three years of experience in England; Canadian troops were in no way less well behaved than troops from other countries. The press attempted to calm him, pointing out that most articles were critical of the behavior of Dutch women rather than Canadian soldiers.<sup>54</sup> Attempting to alleviate the situation, they assured him that:

“The idea was by no means to insult our military guests, who have been given such a cordial welcome, but to draw the attention of our women and girls to the danger they were in.”<sup>55</sup>

Following this conference, complaints and negative comments about the Canadian soldiers disappeared from Dutch newspapers. In addition, the press conference also had the adverse side effect of creating an increase in criticism towards women. Women had already been targeted by the press, but now that Canadian troops no longer faced criticism in the press, they had become the sole bearer of responsibility. To what extent this contributed to the harsh reaction women who engaged in sexual relations faced from society, is difficult to calculate, however we can be certain that it only made their difficult predicament even worse.

Whether or not these warnings had any effect on troops' behavior is difficult to ascertain for certain, however judging from the continued levels of sexual relations, it seems unlikely to have had much effect. In fact, some troop pamphlets such as the “A.B.C. For soldiers on leave”, actually poked fun at the issue. Excerpts from the pamphlet include lines such “D is the Dutch young man, who lost the girl he used to woo”, and “Streets of good old Amsterdam, your peace-time hunting grounds”. The first line pokes fun at the Dutch men who resented the Canadians, while the second line makes reference to the fact that Amsterdam served as a leave centre for Canadians serving in Germany.

Not all sexual relations during the liberation involved romance. Prostitution came to be an increasingly large problem in the Netherlands during the liberation, particularly in Amsterdam which served as a leave centre for Canadian troops. While in Germany, Canadian troops were forbidden from any kind of intimacy with the local populace, and as such were inclined towards sexual activity by the time they had arrived in the Netherlands. The chocolate and cigarettes they brought with them were worth a great deal on the black market, effectively making the Canadian soldiers very wealthy. In combination with the fact that much of the Netherlands was impoverished during the liberation period, this made prostitution a very lucrative and appealing profession. As a result, a great deal of young

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54 Vroemen and Bollen, *Canadezen in Actie*, 276.

55 de Liagre Böhl, “Canadezen in de zomer van 1945”, 247.

Dutch women turned to prostitution in order to make ends meet, and joined the ranks of those who were already engaged in the profession. Prostitution of course, had already existed and has been tolerated in the Netherlands since the Middle Ages, and as such I won't elaborate on the situation for too long.

In addition to prostitution, a number of opportunistic Dutch women actively sought out and wooed Canadian soldiers for gifts. The actual number that engaged in those sorts of activities is difficult to discern, yet the public and media reaction is noteworthy. The Dutch public began to accuse all girls who fraternized with Canadians to be prostitutes, regardless of whether or not they were motivated by romance or profit. Moralists argued that women were not actually interested in the Canadian soldiers themselves, but rather in the material goods they could obtain. Articles voicing similar opinions ran in the press:

“a troop of girls, who act like women of loose morals and find it easier to live off of Canadian chocolate bars and Canadian cigarettes, traded in the black market, then from the income from honorable pursuits.”<sup>56</sup>

In addition, allegations were made that sometimes the parents themselves were the cause of the problem, as they actively encouraged their children to fraternize with the soldiers in order to acquire gifts. While in some instances this may have been the case, by far the most common motivation for sexual behavior was romance, pleasure, and a desire for freedom. Rather than acknowledging this, moralists tied their behavior into to a greater battle for the moral character of the country, while the press continued to push articles fueling the moral panic spreading throughout the nation. Despite all the criticisms, there were some defendants of female sexual activity, such as *De Vlam*, a radical socialist newspaper. The editor-in-chief of the newspaper, Wim Storm, published an article in defense of Dutch women titled “The struggle for love”. In it, he argues that criticism of women is based on jealousy and the possessive instinct of Dutch men, stating that

“It is the most unjust insult to Dutch women, when a self-proclaimed personalistic-socialist magazine dares to write, that they would prostitute themselves for a piece of chocolate, a few cigarettes, or a sip of liquor.”<sup>57</sup>

This however, was far from the general attitude adopted by both the press and society as a whole. The judgmental attitude and lack of understanding shown by society resulted in difficult times for Dutch women, especially for those that had become pregnant as a result of their relations.

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56 de Liagre Böhl, “Canadezen in de zomer van 1945”, 248.

57 de Liagre Böhl, “Canadezen in de zomer van 1945”, 250.

Under the pretext of reducing the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, the moralists created the “Morality Squad” in cooperation with the Canadian military police. This group would patrol hotels and night clubs, rounding up any women below the age 21 found in the company of Canadian troops. The owner of the establishment would get a warning, and repeat offenders would be shut down. In addition a curfew was created for girls under the age of 18, who would be taken by the police for being out past 11. The girls would be brought down to the police station, questioned, and then kept overnight. The nature of the questions is highly accusatory and presumptive, as can be seen below:

- a. 'Have you previously had relations with German soldiers?'
- b. 'How long have you known this Canadian?'
- c. 'Where did you meet him?'
- d. 'Have you had intercourse with this Canadian?'
- e. 'Did you allow him to get hands on with you?'
- f. 'Was a contraceptive used?'
- g. 'Were you given any payment?'<sup>58</sup>

The first question is of particular note, as it brings up the notion that sexual diseases were being spread by those same women which had relations with the Germans. The rationale behind this was that STD's did not exist in the Netherlands until the occupations, and must have been brought to the Netherlands by the Germans. As such, the spread of STDs among Canadian troops and Dutch women was caused by those girls who had engaged in sexual relations with Germans. As a result, any girl who contracted an STD risked being labeled as a “moffen-meisje”.

The accusatory nature of the questions is indicative of the notion that these women were guilty until proven innocent, and it was automatically assumed that they were up to no good. The last question holds the connotation that these women were essentially prostituting themselves out, and the notion that they might have been fraternizing for fun or romance is not even considered. After the interrogations were over, the women would be held overnight and released in the morning only once their parents came down to the station. This whole procedure shows how Dutch society was unwilling to allow women under the age of 21 to act independently, going so far as to reinstate a curfew system similar to the one they had despised so much during the occupation. The fact that police were involved ties into the idea of “national character”, as the situation was deemed to be so important that the government felt compelled to take action. As the moral panic swept through the country, concerned

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58 de Liagre Böhl, “Canadezen in de zomer van 1945”, 249.



citizens increasingly took matters into their own hands, forming moral committees and voicing their concerns both in the media and on the streets. In the ensuing panic, all women became potential targets for criticism, as it was difficult to differentiate between those women who had engaged in sexual relations with Canadian soldiers and those who hadn't. For those women who became pregnant however, it was difficult to hide what had happened and scandal often followed. The situation these women found themselves in will be discussed in the next chapter.

### **Chapter 3: The Predicament Women found themselves in**

With all the panic about the “moral crisis” that had spread throughout the country, little concern was given to the well-being of those who had become pregnant due to sexual relations with Canadian troops. These women were scorned by both their families and society as a whole, and were often kicked out of their family homes. The stories of these women are numerous, and thankfully many are well documented in interviews by both Olga Rains and Bonnie Okkema. While the trials and tribulations of each of these women varied, I have used a number of examples to highlight the kind of situation these women found themselves in. While interesting, I must refrain from listing too many of them in detail and have decided to elaborate on two particular stories. I chose the first of these because the story is in itself both remarkable and interesting. The second story was chosen as I felt that it was representative of what happened to those Dutch women who found themselves pregnant with an illegitimate child. As such it can serve as an archetypal example of what they experienced and how society reacted to them.

The first example is Helena, a young woman who fell in love with a Canadian officer. The two hit it off well, and as the relationship quickly progressed, Bill proposed to her with his grandmother's ring. During their relationship, Bill provided Helena with white pills which he assured her would prevent pregnancy, allowing them to engage in sexual intercourse without worry of repercussions. Unfortunately for Helena, this turned out to be a lie. After she experienced morning sickness, she visited a doctor who explained to her that she was pregnant. The news took Helena completely by surprise, as can be seen in her account of the event:

“The fact that I took my little white pills so faithfully made me think there must be a mistake. I told the doctor about them and he looked at me and smiled. Then he said, “Did you really believe that these pills would stop you from having a baby?” “Yes I did doctor”, I answered him. “Bill told me so, they are from the Canadian Army and in Holland they don't know about them yet.” “You poor child, you are so young and innocent and the smart Canadian fooled you.” Anger welled up

inside me.<sup>59</sup>

Furious, Helena immediately set off to Bill's army camp to find him, but he was already gone. An army officer there told her that they would do what they could to help find him, but a week later came to her apartment to inform her that there was no news. Noting the distress on her face, the officer decided to “help” her:

“Then he opened his briefcase, took out a little address book, wrote out an address for me and handed it to me. “Go and see this lady”, he said. “She will help you.”<sup>60</sup>

Helena made her way to the address, which ended up being a seedy apartment where a woman gave abortions in exchange for money or cigarettes. Terrified by the situation she found herself in and running out of options, she attempted to commit suicide by jumping in front of a truck, but survived and was hospitalized. When she woke up at the hospital her family was there to look after her, and was naturally very concerned for her. Unfortunately, this changed drastically after she informed them about the circumstances which had led to her suicide attempt, and once they found out about her illegitimate child they completely abandoned her. As Helena put it “My condition did not matter anymore, I was not allowed to come home.”<sup>61</sup>. As a result, she checked herself into a “home” for pregnant girls, all of whom had also become pregnant due to sexual relations with Canadians<sup>62</sup>. While the nature of these “homes” varied, they generally operated as a sort of shelter for young women with nowhere else to go to. Usually run by the Catholic or Protestant church, they were heavily influenced by religious doctrine and often sought to educate the girls on moral values. In addition, these homes would often house the girls for a limited time after they had given birth, and some even operated as orphanages. I will elaborate on the workings of these homes later in the chapter after I have finished telling Helena's story.

While at the home, Helena was visited by “The Patronesses” A group of ladies in Amsterdam who visited girls at “homes” in order to offer love, guidance, and support for them while they went through pregnancy. In reality, the “Patronesses” actually just chastised the girls over their mistakes, giving them speeches on “what we did wrong and how we spoiled the image of all the good Dutch women, and what would the soldiers think of us”<sup>63</sup>When Helena went to the hospital for the final stages of pregnancy, the “Patronesses” arranged that Helena was given gray bedspread as opposed to the white

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59 Rains, *Summer of '46*, 81.

60 Rains, *Summer of '46*, 82.

61 Rains, *Summer of '46*, 84.

62 Rains, *Summer of '46*, 84.

63 Rains, *Summer of '46*, 85.

ones, marking her as an unwed mother. As a result she was verbally abused and chastised by visitors as well as the hospital attendees.

To make matters worse for poor Helena, there were complications during childbirth as well. The doctor informed her that her child was mentally and physically disabled, and would be unable to ever be independent. At this time her parents came to visit her in the hospital, and to Helena's relief they brought her back with them to the family house. Her relief was short-lived however, and she found out she was to be wed off to another social reject, a collaborator who had not only been enlisted in the German army, but the SS as well. This is of course, indicative of the low social status that women such as Helena had, as they could be effectively grouped into the same category as collaborators and "Moffenwijken". Fortunately for Helena, her new husband ended up being a good man, and a great father to his adopted child, so in the end there was a sort of happy conclusion to this story.

Still, the manner in which Helena dealt with her situation, as well as the manner in which society treated her, is telling of the poor position women with illegitimate children found themselves in. Her attempted suicide highlights how not only were these women completely alone and isolated from society, but that coping with the situation they found themselves in created a great deal of psychological anguish. Helena's assumption that her family would abandon her once they found out about her child turned out to be completely correct, as once she informed them she was left at the hospital to fend for herself. When her parents eventually came to bring her back, it was not out of compassion, but rather to mitigate the scandal by forcing her into marriage. By no means was this an isolated event, and just like Helena many other women were also rushed into marriage against their will in order to avoid scandal. To hide the true heritage of their children, many took up their step-fathers last name in place of their maiden name. While Helena was fortunate enough to keep her child, others were not so lucky. Mothers were encouraged to give up their children, and in some cases the babies were taken away from their mothers against their will by the church, which put them up in "Homes"<sup>64</sup> like the one described in Helena's story. As one woman puts it, "In those days most people in the South did what they church told them."<sup>65</sup> This was a particularly common occurrence in the South of Netherlands, due to the strong religious influence of the Catholic Church. The church offered little or no sympathy for girls, and constantly reminded them that they had sinned for having a child out of wedlock, as well as blaming them for the trouble they had caused the Canadian soldiers. One woman recalls how during her stay at the home:

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<sup>64</sup> Rains, *Children of the Liberation*, 13.

<sup>65</sup> Olga Rains and Lloyd Rains, *Zij Die Achterbleven: Bevrijdingskinderen op zoek naar hun Canadese vaders*, (Huizen: Pica, 2005), 178.

“They had to travel to the Church twice a day to pray to ask for god's forgiveness for their sins. The whole day the nuns reminded the pregnant girls how sinful they were now that they were having Canadian babies.”<sup>66</sup>

Conditions at the homes were harsh. The women had to do heavy chores, and were locked up in their rooms during the evenings and weekends. Few entered the homes willingly, and most were pressured into it by their parents and the church. While many resisted, there were few other alternatives in those days for single mothers. The only other real option was to leave their family behind and fend for themselves, and the few that took this route had a difficult time. Being a single mother was seen as an unacceptable situation at the time, which is one of the reasons that so many of these girls were hastily forced into marriages.

The second story which I will be discussing in detail is that of Greta. Growing up on a farm house in the province of Groningen, young Greta's story begin with her discussing the environment she grew up in. “We were very sheltered. Life was very boring for us during those last years of the War.”<sup>67</sup> Prior to any interaction that she had with the Canadian troops, Greta's family was informed about the dangers that young women could run into.

“The churches sent out pamphlets to the homes where there were children, and father read it to us. It said something about the girls being cooped up for four years and not being able to live it up like young people should. Now these young soldiers were here and were our friends. This meant that we had to be careful not to lead them into temptation. They were far away from their wives and girlfriends for a long time. We must think about our morals and our duties as young Dutch girls. We were to be friendly and helpful to these men. It said; let them know that you are their friends, no more, just friends.”<sup>68</sup>

This excerpt is interesting in two particular regards. First of all, it shows us that Dutch society, or at least parts of it, was fully aware of the fact that sexual relations between Dutch girls and the advancing troops was a real possibility. Because Groningen is in the North of the country, they would also be one of the last provinces for Allied forces to enter, and as such would be able to learn about sexual relations between soldiers and civilians from the other provinces. The text also shows how the responsibility for refraining from these activities was placed solely on Dutch women. It seems that men, at least in the eyes of the church, would play no part in sexual relations unless they were misled by the actions of these young girls. Of course, it could also be that the church simply wasn't allowed to publish any

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66 Rains and Rains, *Zie Die Achterbleven*, 48.

67 Rains, *Summer of '46*, 37.

68 Rains, *Summer of '46*, 38.

information critical of their “liberators”, as there was an active ban in place on the media criticizing Allied troops. Whether or not this ban also applied to the church, or they refrained willingly is uncertain. In any case, young Greta had been given a warning about engaging romantically with the Canadians, which was reiterated by both of her parents. When the Allied forces finally arrived in Groningen, they were temporarily sheltered by the local population. Two Canadian soldiers were hosted by Greta's family, who fed them and let them sleep in the family barn. They got along well with the family, and the older one, a French-Canadian from Montreal named Leo, showed interest in young Greta. One day Greta went to her room and found something on her bed:

“It was a note from my mother saying, “Greta, I have seen the way Leo is looking at you lately. I am warning you not to do anything you shouldn't do. If Leo gets to free with you, tell him you are not that kind of a girl” Not a word was spoken. That was all the information I got on sex. I would have to find out the rest for myself.”<sup>69</sup>

People like Greta's mother were hesitant to speak to their daughters about sex, despite knowing that there was a very real possibility that it could happen. Both Greta's mother and the church only made allusions to sexual activity, and never referred directly to it. To young women who had no sort of sexual education, these warnings were largely hollow and meaningless, and for most part only confused them. By keeping their children uninformed, this conservative attitude may have actually contributed to both sexual activity and pregnancy. For example, young women may not have had basic knowledge about the menstrual cycle. As such, they wouldn't have known that they had a much higher chance of getting pregnant in the days during their ovulation, which when coupled with the fact that contraceptives were so rarely used, would explain why so many girls ended up pregnant after the first time they had sex.

Just as Greta's mother predicted, Leo was attracted to Greta and persistently attempted to woo her. Eventually, she gave in to his advances, and after engaging in sexual activity just one time, became pregnant. Greta naively assumed that Leo would be delighted to hear the good news, and that the two of them would become married and go Canada together. Unfortunately, this was not the case, and Leo broke down and began to cry after she told him she was pregnant. He admitted that he had not been truthful to her, he was not a single man, but rather a husband with two children waiting for him in Canada. When Greta's father found out he was furious, and physically kicked Leo out of the house, never to be heard from again. As for Greta, she was quickly sent off to a strange farmer's household on the other side of Holland to discreetly handle her pregnancy and give birth. It was a difficult time for

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69 Rains, *Summer of '46*, 39.

her, and while at the farm there were complications:

“During the eighth month I got problems. I was so big I could hardly get around. One night I woke up with a high fever and was delirious. Later they told me I called for Leo. The doctor was worried; there was some sort of infection. I had to stay in bed and take the medicine he gave me and three days went by that I do not remember. They called mother to come and look after me. She tried to feed me, but my appetite was gone. I could see worried faces all around me. The doctor wanted me in the hospital and he talked to mother. She promised to stay and look after me, she wanted me at the farm and she wanted the baby born there.”<sup>70</sup>

Despite the severity of her condition, Greta was kept in isolation for the full duration of her fever. So badly did her parents want to hide the scandalous affair that they went against the doctor's advice and forwent taking her to the hospital. While this may seem cruel, her parents may have acted in what they thought were Greta's best interests, as they knew she would effectively become an outcast from society if other people were to find out. In this regard, they may have been correct, as in general women who found themselves in the same predicament as Greta were treated harshly by society. Greta eventually recovered from her fever, and gave birth shortly after though was left quite weak from the whole ordeal. Almost right after the birth, Greta found out that her parents planned on taking her child from her and raising it as their own. They were planning on hiding the birth of her child from the rest of society, and telling people that it was actually their child and Greta's sister. Greta was horrified by the idea, but weak from childbirth and fever, she wasn't able to resist them for long, eventually giving in to pressure and signing away her legal rights to the child.

When Greta got back home, she found herself in an odd and frustrating situation. Her parents refused to let her raise her own child, and she was forced to subdue her maternal instincts. In addition, she could feel that she had lost her families respect, and that they had begun to look down upon her for her sins:

“In their eyes[Greta's Parents] I was wrong for giving myself to Leo and for that reason I was different than my sisters and was not respected anymore by anyone in my family who knew. I could feel it right away if someone knew my secret, they would treat me just as if I was a lesser human being”<sup>71</sup>

It is interesting to note that Greta's father had actually approved of her relationship with Leo during happier times, and had even made asked him “Leo, after the war is over, are you coming back to marry

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70 Rains, *Summer of '46*, 42.

71 Rains, *Summer of '46*, 44.

Greta?”<sup>72</sup>. Despite this, she was in the wrong for “giving” herself to him, even though her father also seemed to be under the impression that the relationship was going well. As time went on, Greta could no longer bear to live next to her child and so she left to go live in a nearby town, explaining to her mother:

“No mother I can not stay here any longer. Don't you understand how hard it is for me? You won't even let me cuddle my own child.”<sup>73</sup>

Life by herself was difficult, and Greta was forced to do difficult work just to make ends meet. Eventually she found herself a good job at a ladies hat store, which paid well and was satisfying work. She met a young man named Paul at the library, and the two hit it off and began a relationship. As it began to get serious, he asked for her hand in marriage, but she rejected his proposal noting how

“I felt that I did not have the right to spoil Paul's life my my past. He was too good to be marrying a woman like me.”<sup>74</sup>

The whole incident with Leo and her child had severely damaged her self-esteem, such that she felt unfit to be part of someone else's life. With the help of Paul, she is finally able to put the past behind her, and the two marry and have a good life together. When her son turns 18, Paul tells him the truth about who his real parents are, though they all suspect that he secretly already knows.

Greta's story is interesting, and touches upon a number of developments at the time that warrant further discussion. First of all, her story discusses the importance of social standing above all else, and the fear of becoming social outcasts. Greta's parents adopt the child and raise it as their own, a common occurrence among those who wished to prevent the whole scandalous affair from becoming public knowledge. In addition, when Greta becomes sick during her pregnancy, her parents refused to take her to the hospital for fear of her pregnancy becoming public knowledge. This is not the only instance where fear of losing social standing jeopardizes the health of the pregnant woman. In one particularly harrowing case, a young woman's parents lock her up in her room for the duration of the pregnancy. A midwife from another part of the country is brought in to deliver the baby in secrecy, however during childbirth the woman begins to bleed badly. When the bleeding continued without stop, the midwife insisted on getting a doctor but the woman's parents refused. Eventually the midwife went anyway, against the parents will, however by the time the doctor arrived it was too late, and the poor girl passed

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72 Rains, *Summer of '46*, 42.

73 Rains, *Summer of '46*, 46.

74 Rains, *Children of the Liberation*, 48.

away that very night<sup>75</sup>. Society's judgments can also cause a great deal of psychological stress, as can be seen throughout Greta's story. For example suppressing her motherly instinct becomes unbearable and she is forced to leave the house, and her self-esteem is so damaged that she finds herself unworthy of marrying someone and bringing shame into their lives.

Another subject which is mentioned in Greta's story and has already been touch upon a number of times is the church and its influence on Dutch society. A largely religious country, social standing was largely dictated by the church, which decided upon what was and was not moral. Most of the moral committees created during the liberation were founded on Christian principles, and the harsh treatment of those women who engaged in sexual relation usually carried Christian undertones. In addition, institutions such as orphanages and "homes" were run by the church. One woman describes how the church reacted to the issue of illegitimate children during the liberation:

"There were more girls in our area who were expecting babies from Canadian soldiers. This was a big problem for many of them, their church interfered. My parents did not attend a church and their children were not made to attend. I never asked them why they didn't, I really wasn't interested. We lived among people who lived for and with their church and were dominated by it in such a way that they were not free to live their own life anymore."<sup>76</sup>

The strength and influence of the Church dictated how people reacted and dealt with sexual relations and the birth of illegitimate children. The church was a strong advocate for separation in the case of single mothers<sup>77</sup>, and seems to be the major reason for children being given up for adoption right after child birth.

So far I have only discussed those cases where women were abandoned by their Canadian lovers and left to fend for themselves, however it should be noted that this was not always the case. In many cases both parties acknowledged that nothing permanent was to come out of their summer relationship, and pregnancy was only discovered after the Canadians had left. While we do know that some of these Canadian soldiers found out at a later date, with one Canadian going so far as to return to Netherlands to propose, the actual amount that knew about their Dutch children is impossible to discern. In addition, correspondence between the two was often disrupted by the parents of Dutch women, or in some cases the Canadian wives, preventing the soldiers from ever learning the truth. Some Dutch women may have been discouraged by the Canadian military's attempts to hinder the developments of any relationships. One Dutch woman recalls how:

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75 Rains, *Children of the Liberation*, 160.

76 Rains, *Children of the Liberation*, 179.

77 Rains, *Children of the Liberation*, 46.



“An announcement on the radio shortly after the War ended, told everyone that the Canadian Armed Forces in Holland at that time would never be made responsible for children they left behind, unless the soldier was married, with Army permission, to the Dutch girl.”<sup>78</sup>

In other cases the Canadian soldiers knew about the pregnancy, but after discussing it with their lovers came to the mutual agreement that it would be best if they left their children behind.

On a more positive note, it should be noted that not all relations ended in betrayal and heart break. There are a number of instances where the couples became engaged, and with the permission of the Canadian army, eventually married as well. These women became known as “War Brides”, and would travel across the ocean to start new lives in Canada, sometimes bringing children with them. The amount of women who ended up marrying Canadians is uncertain, with some figures pointing to a total of over 2,000 Dutch girls married Canadian soldiers,<sup>79</sup> while others point to a smaller amount at 1,886<sup>80</sup><sup>81</sup>. In addition, the amount of children brought back to Canada is numbered at 428<sup>82</sup>, a relatively small number when compared to the roughly 5,000 children who remained in the Netherlands. Many women were also told by their lovers that they too, would eventually become war brides and join them in Canada. A good deal of the Canadians sincerely meant it as well, however due to obstacles such as the military making things difficult for them and the passage of time leading to other developments, the two were to remain separated.

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78 Rains, *Summer of '46*, 89.

79 Rains, *Children of the Liberation*, 17.

80 de Liagre Böhl, “Canadezen in de zomer van 1945”, 245.

81 Vroemen and Bollen, *Canadezen in Actie*, 276.

82 Vroemen and Bollen, *Canadezen in Actie*, 276.

## **Chapter 4: Children's upbringing**

In the summer of 1946, the seeds of sexual activity during the liberation began to take sprout. These children of single mothers were born in secrecy when possible, to hide the shame that they brought to their mothers and their families. The term "liberation children" is in itself is a bit of a misnomer, as it implies that this was some sort of homogeneous group, when in reality their experiences varied considerably. By no means was this a heterogeneous group, and by using the term "liberation" to describe them, it adds a somewhat positive connotation to a rather sordid affair. A more accurate term, such as "abandoned children" would have shined a negative light on the liberators, and as such was likely avoided in order to avoid criticizing the Canadians. During the liberation of the Netherlands, society and the government wanted to focus on their new-found independence, and perhaps they simply didn't want to acknowledge this blight on an otherwise joyful moment in Dutch history. As for the liberation children themselves, knowledge of their true origins, how they were raised, and the manner in which society reacted to their presence was unique in each case. With that said, there are a number of underlying trends and patterns which can be found among the various stories I have read. Almost all of the children experienced difficult childhoods, with society frowning upon their very existence, a physical reminder of the mistakes their countrymen made during the liberation. This notion of shame on "national character" contributed to the harsh treatment these children experienced at the hand of other, and their status as unwanted also often lead to abuse from their stepfathers.

To highlight the difficult childhood of those children who were unwanted both by society as well as their adopted parents, I would like to discuss the story of "Little Cinderella". From a young age, this child of the liberation was told that she was different, and that simply by existing she was

doing something wrong. She recalls how:

“As long as I live, I will never forget the sad memories of my youth. At school I was called “Child of Sin”, by the nuns. I didn't know what that meant, but I did know that I was different, because people would whisper behind my back and point their fingers at me.”<sup>83</sup>

Her mother had been unable to get permission from her parents to marry her Canadian boyfriend, and as a result she was rushed into marriage. Unfortunately, because of her status as a single, pregnant woman, she was considered undesirable, and as a result was unable to marry a good man.

“My real mother had married a no-good lazy man. As a marked woman that was all she could get. She had given birth to a child of a Canadian soldier. That was the way it was in 1946”<sup>84</sup>

Cinderella's new father was a drunk who detested her, yet she never knew the true reason behind this. She was simply treated differently from her other siblings and that was that. Beatings were common, and in addition, she was forced by her stepfather to steal paint, and also to wake up at 4 in the morning to go pick up coal from the factory, often causing her to miss school. As she grew older things the situation only got worse, and on one occasion her stepfather attempted to seduce her, though fortunately she was able to resist his advances<sup>85</sup>. Throughout this treatment, her mother did nothing to help her:

“My mother would never stick up for me when he hit me. I wondered why she didn't. I was to find out from my grandma later on. Every day it was doing wash by hand, changing diapers, doing shopping and carrying babies around. My life was a drudge and I was treated like a slave. I was only nine years old then.”<sup>86</sup>

When Cinderella's grandmother finally told her the truth about her real father at the age of 12, it was an eye-opening experience for her which allowed her to understand why she was treated so differently from her siblings. An interesting story, it contains a number of trends I have come across in my research, the most reoccurring of which is how “bevrijdings kinderen” were usually unaware of who their real fathers were.

One of the major themes of Cinderella's story and also a common occurrence among the early childhood's of many liberation children is abuse from within the household, both physically as well as

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83 Rains, *Children of the Liberation*, 48.

84 Rains, *Children of the Liberation*, 48.

85 Rains, *Children of the Liberation*, 48.

86 Rains, *Children of the Liberation*, 49.

psychologically. Rushed into marriage, their mothers poor standing in society meant that they often found themselves with men of bad reputation, such as drunks or collaborators. In many cases, the stepfathers would resent their adopted children. As a result of this, the children received poor treatment which could vary anywhere from simply despising the children, to actively verbally and physically abusing them. In addition, child labor, such as how Cinderella was made to pick up coal from the factory, appears in a number of stories from liberation children. While doing chores for the family is of course, a natural part of life, the work given to these children was often strenuous and much harder than what the father would assign to his own biological children. Harsh treatment was not always the case of course, and in other cases the adopted father would have nothing but love for their newfound children. Greta's story from chapter 3 is a great example of how even though she found herself with an undesirable spouse (an SS collaborator), he ended up being a fine father who loved her child as much as the children they eventually had together. In addition to poor treatment from their stepfathers, there are also a number of cases where the mothers themselves had little love for the children. To them, the child was a constant reminder of the mistake that they had made, a painful memory from which they could not rid themselves. Resentment towards their children for effectively "ruining their lives" could lead to bitter and angry relationships.

In yet other cases, relationships between mothers and their children would simply not exist, as the unwanted children would be given up for adoption or placed into homes. It should be noted that this was of course not usually done out of resentment, but due to pressure from outside forces such as family, the church, or society in general. Another common trend which I covered in the previous chapter, was how the grandparents of the liberation children would adopt them, raising them as their children with their biological mothers taking on the role of a sister. In other cases the child would be given to family friends, commonly taken in by couples who were unable to have children of their own. In some cases money was exchanged, and the child was effectively bought by a wealthy family. The church had a number of special "homes" where unmarried mothers could leave their babies to be taken care of by the nuns. The mothers were given a six week period in which they could decide if they wanted to keep their baby, or put it up for adoption, legally giving up all rights to the child.<sup>87</sup>

Something that I briefly touched upon in Cinderella's story was the social impact that the liberation children had, and also the impact which society had upon them. In this regard there are two separate groups of sort. The first group entails those children whose mothers were able to hide their true origins from society at large. These children were treated just like any others, and their unique

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<sup>87</sup> Rains, *Children of the Liberation*, 98.

impact on society would only be felt later on in life, when they began their search for their Canadian fathers. As such, I will ignore this group for now, and instead focus on those children who were known by contemporary society to be children of Canadians. For this group, early childhood was a difficult time. Bullying and teasing from other children were common, as well as looks of disdain and snide comments from older people. It is interesting to note that throughout this treatment, many of the children continued to be oblivious about their true origin, despite being confronted directly by it. In most cases however, this sort of treatment would eventually lead to questions, and seems to be the most common starting point on the search for the truth. One statement in particular highlights this sort of conundrum:

“At the school playground a small group of children had gathered around two little girls. They were fighting and pushing each other. One shouted to the other, “My mother said that you are from a Canadian soldier.” The other one answered, “I am not, my daddy died when I was a baby, my Mama told me so.”<sup>88</sup>

These sorts of situations caused a great amount of doubt and confusion in the young children, who would eventually begin to ask questions of their parents. Considering the positive image of the Canadian liberators in modern and to a large extent contemporary times as well, it seems odd that these children would have such a difficult time with teasing and bullying. Indeed, there exists juxtaposition in the manner in which the Dutch looked up to the Canadians and cheered them on, yet looked down at their children. One would think that being the child of a soldier might even be a symbol of status, yet in reality they were treated in a similar fashion as the children of collaborators and Germans. This juxtaposition between the way that Canadian soldiers were held in such high regard and their children treated so poorly did not go unnoticed by the “liberation children”

“One incident stands out clearly in my mind. I was around twelve or thirteen and was shopping with my mother in a big store. Someone my mother had known years before, came over to us and asked my mom how many children she now had. Mom answered, “We have five children now.” This woman looked at me and said, “I meant not counting that one.” I cannot write down how I felt then. A big lump came in my throat and I was fighting back the tears. Was that the same woman who had stood along the roadside to wave at the Liberators entering our village in 1945? She liked my mother and she like my father, but I was nothing. I was something that shouldn't have been born, according to her.”<sup>89</sup>

Even after these women had been reintegrated into society their children remained social pariahs which were not to be discussed. Teased and bullied from an early age, many of these children knew that they

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<sup>88</sup> Rains, *Children of the Liberation*, 64.

<sup>89</sup> Rains, *Children of the Liberation*, 58.

were different from their peers, but never knew exactly why that was. In many cases, these direct confrontations lead to social anxiety and a feeling of “not belonging”. A common trend among these children is the idea that something was missing from their life and that they were incomplete and something was wrong, even though they did not know why they felt that way. Even when being confronted directly by it, such as when children on the playground called them “Canadians”, they would still be confused. Cinderella for examples recalls how

“When I went to school the other children would pester me and call me bad names, but I didn't understand. I didn't know that my father was a Canadian, not until I was 16 years old, when my aunt told me.”<sup>90</sup>

It seems that the notion of them being the children of Canadian soldiers was so outlandish and incompatible with what they knew, that they would often simply dismiss those remarks. At home the situation was often no better, usually due to poor treatment at the hands of their stepfathers. One liberation child recalls how the situation confused him, yet at the time he was unable to determine why:

“Not knowing at that time that my real father was a Canadian, I often wondered why my father hated me so much, he didn't seem to hate his other sons.”<sup>91</sup>

In those cases where everyone except the liberation children themselves knew the truth, it seems curious that their parents would actively try and hide it from. Some insight into this can be found from texts like the following:

Everyone in the village knew about Trixie's father being a Canadian soldier, everyone but Trixie. Why had nobody told her? Her mother had planned to tell her when she was older.”<sup>92</sup>

A common reason for hiding the truth was that it would cause unnecessary confusion for the child, and that it was simply better for them to grow up thinking that their stepfather was their real father. In other cases, their mothers simply did not want to be reminded of painful memories, and sought to avoid conversations about the topic, even after being directly confronted by it. Often times liberation children would be unable to get the truth out of their mothers who refused to speak about the past, and ended up finding out from their step-fathers or relatives. Many only confirmed their suspicions much later on in life, sometimes at their mother's deathbeds, who finally decided to confess the truth. To others it came

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90 Rains, *Children of the Liberation*, 59.

91 Rains, *Children of the Liberation*, 98-99.

92 Rains, *Children of the Liberation*, 64.

as a complete surprise, and they found themselves overwhelmed by this new information. Below is an example of how negatively this could be handled:

“Only when he was already a teenager did he find out that his “parents” were actually his grandparents, and that his “big sister” was really his mother. It was a big shock for the boy. This new knowledge that his fathers had left him and his mother had abandoned him left him so spiritually confused that he even attempted to commit suicide. Not a day went by when Johnny didn't think about his Canadian father.”<sup>93</sup>

The severe depression that wracked Johnny was a rare occurrence, but by no means an isolated event. Others also had difficulty with coming to terms with their true identity and the notion of who they really were. Unable to cope with this identity-crisis, they became depressed and withdraw, and some took to alcoholism<sup>94</sup>.

Depression was not the only negative reaction that the liberation children had to finding out the truth about their origins. Others became angry, not just at their fathers for abandoning them, but also at their mothers. Reasons behind this are varied, though the most common ones seem to be for making their childhoods difficult, as well as for becoming pregnant without having a stable relationship. In some cases this anger ruined the relationship between mother and child, as one liberation child notes:

“From then on the relationship between Karin and I changed. My little girl was grown up now and knew the truth. She showered Arnold[her stepfather] with love and attention, but I was left out.”<sup>95</sup>

In this particular case, the relationship between mother and daughter completely ended after the stepfather passed away, and the two never saw each other again.

Johnny's obsession with his Canadian father on the other hand, was a reaction shared by the majority of the liberation children. For most, this new information sparked a desire to be reunited with their true fathers, not out of anger or spite, but rather in order to fill this gap in their lives, as they felt that they would be incomplete without having met their biological father. This desire for closure continued to grow over the year, resulting in many beginning their search decades after they had learned the truth. Of course there are always exceptions to the rule, and some had no desire to have anything to do with their Canadian fathers. Angry and resentful at their fathers for abandoning them, they saw no need to meeting a stranger who had never been part of their lives.

Up until the 1980s, this search was generally restricted to individual cases over a sporadic

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93 Rains and Rains, *Zij die Achterbleven*, 35.

94 Rains and Rains, *Zij die Achterbleven*, 183.

95 Rains, *Summer of '46*, 148.

period of time, and the surge only really began after increased exposure to the situation as well as the creation of both Project Roots and the Association of Liberation children. We can also ascertain that there are a number of “liberation children” who still have no knowledge about their real origins, and may live and die without ever knowing who they really are.

## **Chapter 5: Search for Parents**

During the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands in 1990, a number of Canadian war veterans came to the Netherlands to participate in the celebrations. As they paraded down the streets of Amsterdam, they noticed a peculiar site. Among the revelers where a number of men and women holding signs asking “Are you my Dad?” while others simply held signs with the names of Canadian soldiers<sup>96</sup>.

While liberation children had been looking for their fathers ever since they began to find out the truth, it was only during this decade that an organized and concerted effort began. There are a number of reasons for this. First of all, at this point many of the liberation children were now married with families of their own, but felt that their families would be incomplete until they had met their real fathers. They wanted their children to have grandparents, and to finally put this nagging thought in the back of their mind to rest. In addition, at this point in their lives they had a reasonable income which would allow them to pursue their search and travel to Canada. Travel costs were also much lower at this point in time, when previously air travel had been reserved only for those with high incomes. In addition, many heard through the media about how other Liberation Children had been successfully reunited with their Canadian fathers, and no longer felt alone in their search. This led to the creation of a number of groups dedicated to reuniting liberation children with their fathers, which in turn further increased awareness of the subjected and aided them in their search.

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96 Marshal, “When daddy went marching home”



In 1980<sup>97</sup>, Olga Rains and her husband Lloyd Rains, founded Project Roots, an organization dedicated to helping liberation children find their Canadian fathers. In addition, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), aired an episode of the television show *The Fifth Estate* on the topic of liberation children. Titled “Children of the Liberation”, the episode aired on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May and immediately afterwards a large number of Canadian fathers contacted Olga Rains to see if she could help them find their Dutch children<sup>98</sup>. Besides Project Roots, another organization, the Association of Liberation Children was also set up in order to help facilitate reunifications.

As the children of the liberation began their search for their fathers, many encountered the problem that they had no real basis from which to start. Only bits and pieces of the puzzle existed, such as their father’s first name, a photograph, and maybe a letter. To make matters worse, it was common for their mother to be uncooperative in their search, often withholding information or in some cases giving misleading information. In one particular instance for example, the mother of a liberation child gives him his real father's last name after he continuously plead with her for help. Using this information, he traveled to Canada, asking the media for help and making cold calls to everyone listed in the phonebook to see if they can offer him any help. Despite receiving many replies offering words of encouragement and wishing him good luck, nothing comes out of his search. Years later at his mother's deathbed, she tells him that she had lied to him, and finally gives him his father's real name before passing away. Even after he found his father, it turned out that the name he was given was spelled incorrectly. While in this particular case the father was eventually found and reunited with his child, other cases do not have such clear-cut endings. In a similar story a liberation child finds his father's contact information, but is unable to discern whether or not it is really him. He recalls:

“My father was found, but he denies that he is my father. Is he lying, or did my mother give me the wrong name?”<sup>99</sup>

Inaccurate information was not always caused by the deliberate attempts of the liberation children's mothers. Memories from so long ago were vague and inaccurate, making accurate recollections of events difficult. In one example, a liberation child's mother attempts to help her in her search, but was only able to vaguely recall her father's name:

“She remembered his first name, Eddie, but she wasn't so sure about his last name, only that it sounded like 'Murry’”<sup>100</sup>

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97 Rains and Rains, *Zij die Achterbleven*, 5.

98 Rains, *Children of the Liberation*, 4.

99 Rains, *Children of the Liberation*, 52.

100 Rains and Rains, *Zij Die Achterbleven*, 178-9.

Details which could help the liberation children in their search, such as platoon number, regiment, and the correct spelling of names were often forgotten. In addition, many had thrown away all letters and correspondence out of anger or a desire to forget, meaning that there was little or no paper trail to follow. This was not always done by the mothers themselves, but also by grandparents who had wanted their daughters to marry a local man and forget about the Canadians. In other cases soldiers may not have used their real names in order to avoid any sort of further contact with their lovers.

In spite of these difficulties, the liberation children latched on to whatever information they could obtain, following clues and conducting research. But even once they knew crucial information such as their father's real names and regiment number, they still had encountered a number of problems with the Canadian authorities. When they contacted the Department of Veterans Affairs in Canada, they were often informed that they could not give out any personal information regarding veterans. Under the Canadian Privacy Act, the department was not allowed to disclose any information on Canadian citizens to third parties, but would only act as an intermediary between parties and forward correspondence if deemed suitable. Stonewalled by the Canadian government, many of the liberation children travelled all the way to Canada despite the lack of information and not knowing exactly where their fathers were. They contacted the media in an attempt to raise awareness, making appearances in newspapers, radio, and television programs pleading for any information that people could give them<sup>101</sup>. Their stories were popular in Canada, and coverage of their stories was quite extensive considering how many of them took this approach and how receptive Canadian media was to the idea. In addition they published their stories in Veterans Clubs such as The Legion, asking if anyone knew about their fathers. This approach was quite successful, as they were often contacted by veterans who had served in the same regiment as their parents. Sometime the veterans were helpful and gave them information on their father's whereabouts, or acted as an intermediary between them. In other cases however they either feigned ignorance or refused to help, as they didn't want to betray their comrades. Frustrated at the lack of information, some liberation children searched through phonebooks and attempted to cold call and mass email any Canadian contacts who shared the last name as their parents.

On the other side of the Atlantic, some Canadian veterans were looking for the children they left behind in the Netherlands. Those who had kept on good terms with their lovers often kept in contact, and for them they simply had to make the journey to Netherlands. Others had lost all information except the name of the Dutch women, and had to use similar search methods that the liberation children used. As awareness of the liberation children grew through word of mouth and media exposure, some

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101 Rains and Rains, *Zij Die Achterbleven*, 53.

veterans became curious if they too had unknowingly fathered children in the Netherlands. They contacted Project Roots and the Association of Liberation Children to see if they could help, and many were successfully reunited with the children that they had up until recently, never known existed. Other cases were less successful, as the children were found but had no desire to meet their Canadian fathers. Canadian war veteran Stan for example, traveled to the Netherlands to search for his son. After an extensive search he managed to contact him, only to find out that his son Stan wanted nothing to do with him<sup>102</sup>.

Despite the numerous obstacles in their journey, the actual amount of searches that ended in success is surprisingly high. According to Olga Rains 3,500 liberation children have been successfully reunited with their fathers<sup>103</sup>. Herman de Liagre Bohl states that there were a total of 7,000 illegitimate children born in the aftermath of the liberation, an unknown number of which were from Canadian soldiers<sup>104</sup>. The Association of Liberation Children websites states that there are 5,000 liberation children, which seems accurate when cross-referenced with the previous figure. So assuming that these figures are accurate, a remarkable 70 percent of all Liberation children have been successfully reunited with their parents

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102 Rains, *Children of the Liberation*, 33.

103 Rains and Rains, *Zij Die Achterbleven*, 11.

104 de Liagre Böhl, "Canadezen in de zomer van 1945", 246.

## **Chapter 6: Reunification**

At the end of their long and difficult search, many found what they were hoping for; a joyful reunification with their long lost father and a newfound sense of identity. For others however, this was not to be the case. Johnny for example, travelled to Canada to meet his father but discovered that he was too late, and his father had already passed away in 1963 to cancer. Despite this, he was warmly received by his father's wife and his half-siblings who he remains in contact with to this day. While he now knows a little about his father through his conversations with his Canadian family, he still knows nothing about his parent's relationship as his mother refuses to speak to him about it. Apparently the two continued to correspond by mail after he went back to Canada, but Johnny will never know the nature of their content as his mother burned all the letters after reading them. To make matters worse, Johnny's trip to Canada in search of his father had repercussions on his relationship with his mother:

“Johnny's mother wasn't happy that he had found his Canadian family, because that meant that he had also found out that she had hid the truth from him. Johnny tried to explain how important it was for him to know his Canadian roots, but she simply didn't understand. The relation between mother and son was broken as a result.”<sup>105</sup>

Johnny was by no means an isolated case, as many mother's wanted to leave the past behind and the

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105 Rains, *Children of the liberation*, 37.

search often caused strains upon the relationship between child and mother. Just like Johnny, many were too late in their search and were unable to ever meet their fathers, who passed away due to accidents, illness, or old age. Despite this, many found consolation in the fact that their Canadian relatives were so enthusiastic about meeting them, and how quick they were to embrace them as part of the family. This was a particularly rewarding experience for those liberation children who had grown up in orphanages and had no real family, as they finally felt a feeling of belonging, something that had been missing from their lives. While half-brothers and sisters were as far as I have read universally accepting of their long lost siblings, there has been some resistance from their mothers.

The wives of the Canadian soldiers sometimes acted as barriers for the liberation children, refusing to allow them to see each other. Many felt humiliated by the fact that their husbands had cheated on them during the war, and wanted to avoid the scandal that would come about if the liberation children were to visit. While in many cases the husband only met the wife after his romantic relationship in the Netherlands, the woman was still hesitant to allow these children from the past into their lives. Others allowed the reunification to occur in a limited capacity, with some fathers telling their children that this would be the one and only time they met. In another case the wife reluctantly allowed for the reunification to happen, and when her husband went to meet his son in the Netherlands she and her children came along with him. The whole trip she was bitter and rude, yet at the end of the trip she broke down in tears and apologized for her behavior:

“ Before they left, the wife apologized for her behavior and told them how sorry she was. She had been afraid that the Dutch son would become his father's favorite and that his other children would come in second place.”<sup>106</sup>

Unlike the fathers who often knew or at least suspected that they had left a child behind in the Netherlands, these women were completely taken aback by this new situation and didn't know how to handle it. As such, they were reluctant to allow their husbands to meet up with the liberation children. In many cases the husbands had similar sentiments. Until fairly recently they had been in the dark about the child they had left behind, and many were skeptical as to whether or not they were really related to the person who contacted them. In addition they were worried about the motivation behind these meetings, the usual fear being that these people wanted money or to extort them. Usually they overcame these worries after they had been reassured about the veracity of the liberation children's stories; however in some cases other reasons still prevented the reunification.

While most liberation children were eventually able to find their fathers, not all of them were

able to actually meet them. Upon reaching out to their fathers, often through intermediaries, they discovered that their fathers wanted nothing to do with them. While we don't always know the reason for this, as each individual has his own reasons, there are a number of reoccurring causes that I have seen on multiple occasions. Feelings of guilt for example, are quite common, and the veterans would rather not be reminded of the mistakes they made in the past. Others wished to avoid the scandal of having their illegitimate child becoming known. In one case the father agreed to meet his son simply so that he could appease him and make him promise never to let his wife know about what happened. It appeared he didn't want the whole scandalous affair to be known, as it would ruin his reputation as a war "hero"<sup>107</sup>. We have to take into consideration that while some of the soldiers acknowledged that they had been in the wrong for leaving their child behind in the Netherlands, others were far more selfish. They still had the same loose morals which had led to them committing the act in the first place, and were unrepentant about their actions.

In spite of these setbacks and the father's initial misgiving about meeting up with their long lost children, many eventually overcame their worries and were able to reunify with them. One example of a successful case of reunion is Mieka Sipma's story. When she first contacted her father by letter, he responded in a friendly manner, however he expressed no desire to actually meet up with her. To Mieka, it seemed to be a "hello, goodbye" kind of letter, saying it was nice to hear from her but that was the end of it. Not to be deterred by this setback, Mieka continued to send him letters, and after corresponding for about a year she decided to mail him expressing her desire to come visit him in Canada. After receiving no reply for over a month, she nervously called him and was told that there was a letter on the way. The next day she received her answer: "Please come over, I love to see you". Thrilled by his response, she booked a plane ticket for Canada and the two had a joyful meeting at Toronto airport. They instantly took to each other, and there was no awkward silence but instead they spent hours chatting at her hotel. He told her all about his life and introduced her to his son that evening. Two days later they drove down to his house in Guelph where Mieka met Pearl, her father's second wife, and her half-sister. Overall, the trip was extremely satisfying for Mieka, who felt an overwhelming feeling of closure after meeting the family she never knew.

It should be noted that while the vast majority of reunifications occurred between the children and their fathers, in a few instances the Dutch mothers would once again meet their Canadian lovers. These meetings were made difficult by a number of reasons. First of all, time was a large factor, and generally forty or more years had gone past since their last meeting. As such, both of the participants

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107 Rains and Rains, *Zij die Achterbleven*, 51.

had aged, and often one or even both of them had passed away or was too old to make the trip across the Atlantic. In addition, generally one of the two simply didn't want to see the other again, due to numerous reasons I have previously discussed. The results of those reunifications that did occur were varied. Some were enthusiastic about the meeting and looked forward to seeing their old lovers. Other were hesitant and resistant to the idea, but were pressured into it by their children who felt that this would offer them both a sense of closure. The latter usually went poorly, as the meeting stirred up old painful memories which would have best been avoided. The former usually went well, as in these cases the couple had either originally parted on good terms, or had moved on with their lives and forgiven any previous transgressions. There were some exceptions to this however, and in one case the joyful reunification between the two caused strains on the husband's marriage, as his wife was not pleased about him suddenly having this other women back in his life. Many meetings were also made somewhat difficult by language barriers, as usually the Dutch women only spoke rudimentary English, or none at all. Still, this didn't prevent the two from enjoying each other's company, as when they had met each other during the liberation the same communication barriers had been in place. Many of these meetings had a lasting impact, with the two former lovers reestablishing frequent correspondence and making multiple visits to see each other again. In a few noteworthy examples the two even renewed their romantic relationship.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

Discussing the social impact that Canadian soldiers had in the Netherlands is an interesting topic, because it generally seems to invoke good feelings among the Dutch. The idea of the Canadian soldiers as these brave liberators who freed the country from the German occupiers is one that has been continually repeated throughout the years in academic literature, the national canon, and the country's commemoration of the Second World War. The topic of sexual relations between soldiers and women is rarely discussed, if at all. References to war brides and the happy marriages to Canadian soldiers can be found in literature in the National library, however no mention of the negative impact is discussed outside of a few abnormal sources. It seems that Dutch society and academia has no knowledge about these issues, or perhaps does not want to dwell on such unpleasant memories. To a large extent this may be an extension of the same kind of mentality which prevented further criticism of the Canadian's in the first place. To be critical of the liberators could be seen as a sign of ungratefulness, and in modern times the issue might not be considered important enough to dwell upon. The historical gap could also be attributed to the government ban on criticism of Allied troops during the liberation, as well as Lt. General Guy Simonds criticisms of the Dutch press. Both events reduced coverage of the "scandalous" behavior of Canadian troops among the Dutch public, and people may not have been willing to discuss such sensitive issues especially now that the press was silent on the topic. With any



discussion of the issue being a social taboo, people would only concentrate on the positive aspects of the Canadian troops.

Yet social taboo or not, the effects could still be felt and seen throughout the country . Illegitimate children were still being born whether or not people discussed it, and women were falling prey to the advances of the Canadian soldiers. Indeed, pamphlets on the dangers of fraternizing with the troops continued to be passed out, while a number of moral committees were created to prevent any sort of sexual activity with minors. With such a “moral panic” spreading through the country, it seems odd that people would simply forget about the behavior of the Canadians, yet Dutch society became so transfixed on policing their own women that they failed to recognize that sexual activity involved both parties. As criticism of the Canadians slowly disappeared from the press, women became the sole bearers of responsibility, and as such took the brunt of the blame. Their treatment was largely indicative of the conservative and religious values of the time, and they were blamed for being sinners, and for tempting the soldiers. Worse still, they were even accused of engaging in sexual relations simply for material gain, and any girl fraternizing with soldiers could be accused of prostitution. This harsh treatment of women was exacerbated by feelings of jealousy among Dutch men, as well as the notion that they were bringing shame to the “national character” of the country. For those women who ended up pregnant, the situation was even worse and the social impact greater. Her pregnancy essentially became a social and familial issue as they took a direct involvement in dictating what would happen to the child. The church advocated heavily for adoption, as a single mother was simply seen as an unacceptable situation. The women's families would either follow the word of the church, either because they believed that this was the right thing to do, or because they were so concerned with how they would be viewed by the rest of society that they wanted to do away with the “problem”. Regardless of what would happen to these women and their children, they would both continue to be affected by it for the rest of their lives.

The fact that the harsh criticisms society dealt out on single mothers would be carried over to the children is indicative of how long lasting the effects of the liberation could be. Social pressure spanned generations, including not only these women, but their parents and children as well. Growing up as a liberation child was a difficult and confusing time. For those who had stepfathers, times could be particularly tough, as generally single mothers were forced to marry men of ill-repute as no one else would have them. Their step-fathers often hated them, and treated them accordingly. Problems outside the household were no better, with constant bullying and teasing, not just from children but adults as well. These so called “children of sin” were made to believe that they were different, that there was something fundamentally wrong with their being, yet they generally only found out later on in life. As a

result they grew up confused and often felt that something about them was incomplete or missing. When they eventually found out about who they really were, it came as a shock to some while others suspected all along. How they handled this news varied greatly, with some becoming angry, others depressed, and some joyful about the exciting news. In general however, they all eventually found a great desire to track down and meet their real fathers, and the fact that so many of them decided to do so resulted in a sort of social movement. While many had felt alone their whole lives, the discovery that they were part of a larger group was a comforting thought. Their search led to the creation of a number of groups designed to help reunite liberation children with their Canadian fathers, one of the most notable being the Association of Liberation Children. Founded in 1980 and still operating to this day, this shows us how the effects of the liberation continue to have an impact almost 70 years after the war's end. Even now the association's website continues to attract liberation children who have posted what information they know about their fathers in the hope that someone can help them in their search.

As for the actual reunifications between liberation children and their fathers that did go through, the results varied in terms of how successful they were. Many were able to have the joyful reunification they were hoping for, and immediately felt a deep connection with the fathers they had never met before. Others were not so fortunate, as their fathers had already passed away, or in some cases were alive but rejected their attempts to set up a meeting. Those whose father's had passed away were still able to meet their Canadian relatives, and were almost always accepted as part of the family. In total 3,500 of the 5,000 documented liberation children were successfully reunited, an astounding figure and a testament to the willpower and effort they put into their search<sup>108</sup>. The impact of their search can be seen in both the media attention they gathered as well as the social impact that had both in Canada as well as the Netherlands. Despite this coverage, general awareness about the liberation children remains low in the Netherlands, and academic literature is practically non-existent. Regardless of how little people in Netherlands know about sexual relations during the liberation, it had a huge impact on society at the time and the consequences thereof continue to be felt today. It sparked a moral panic which swept through the country and forced society to address the issue of sex out of wedlock. In addition, it caused a backlash against the Canadian soldiers who had originally been held in such high regard. The social impact continued to the next generation, as the liberation children were held responsible for their mothers actions. With such a large impact through time, the subject warrants further research.

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108 Rains and Rains, *Zij Die Achterbleven*, 11.

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