

MAR 25 1946

“When They Ask Who Freed Us . . .”

A Moving Good-bye to Canadians From a Dutch Editor Who Speaks From the Heart

Deventer, the 10th of March, '46.

Dear Sir: Enclosed I send you an open letter to the soldiers of the Canadian Army. This one has been inserted in a Dutch illustrated weekly at the departure of the Canadians from Holland. I read it, and was very sorry that “the boys” couldn't read it; so I translated it. I'm sorry, but I know that I made many mistakes. I hope that you will be so kind as to correct and insert it in the Hamilton Spectator. Thanking you in anticipation. Yours very truly,

ANNEKE KLEIN KLOUWENBERG,
“A Dutch girl from Deventer,”

1st Pauwenlandstraat 3,

Deventer, Holland.

Good-bye, Canada!

Open letter to the Canadian soldiers!

To Jimmy, Jack, Harold, Reggie, Tom, Bill and Harry and the thousands of other battle-dressed boys of the Canadian Army!

Old Boy! With the farewells that finally you, too, had to take from your Dutch friends, now you return to your country. You will permit me to give you a few words in a heart-to-heart talk.

When you, eight months ago, on a, for us, historical day, entered the capital of our country, from all sides the boys and girls jumped on your jeeps, then you found a nation of grateful and moved people, who hardly knew their happiness.

First you didn't understand the tear you saw in many eyes and you couldn't understand that, because you didn't know the sufferings which we had to bear during five years, the sufferings from which thousands of men, women and children went to rack and ruin and that we all, when you got acquainted with us, bore in despair.

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Your first impression gave you a wrong idea of the reality. That wasn't your fault. You thought that the cigarette was the principal thing that we had done without, we hailed you with the “classic question”: “Have you got a cigarette for me? Just as if that was our national greeting. And the cigarette that you used to dole out, sometimes it was your last one; at that moment it was a benefaction, we recovered our sick nerves when we smoked your “real” cigarette. We revived, but your cigarette—you were astonished on account of the gratitude they showed—was an emblem, for you gave us every time the same, the confirmation of our liberty, and it took us some time, dear boy, to demonstrate our great happiness.

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We knew that our capital, Amsterdam, became a “leave centre” under the guidance of your chief, Lieut.-Col. G. Weir. It wasn't the least result of the circumstance that you and your comrades took care of it, that it isn't a heap of rubbish now. During the time you stayed in our country, you saw something of our manners and morals, of our habitudes and unmannerliness, learned something of our history and our nature, our traditions and our temper, and many other things. You will take them with you like a memory to your country, so far away in the north of America.

Between the very old history of our country, with its civilization and cultivation, and the still young history of your country, is a world of difference. You and your family don't know about the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, but something else you didn't know, too, the torment of the German occupation during five years, that was finished when you came. The German yoke of bondage, the Jerries, as you used to call them, gave themselves the name of “nation of gentlemen,” and when I think now—excuse me—that you Canadian boys often brought us the memories of the cowboys from the American Wild West pictures, then, I must say, that the acquaintance with the “boys,” in spite of all, was much better than that one with the “gentlemen.”

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I said, in spite of all, for you know as well as I know you sometimes gave us reason for uneasiness and worry. You see, sometimes you were a little bit too spontaneous and too tempestuous. You were a little bit too rough with your vehicles on our roads and “a little bit” too tempestuous with our girls.

As we, free Dutchmen, were fit again after our “struggle for life,” you and your friends started your “struggle for love,” and be sure that you presented troubles to many Dutch mothers. They spoke and wrote much about you, and I don't like to be severe on you for that, for the carelessness with which you threw yourself into the reckless love affairs was an understandable result of the hard war, with its privation, solitude and want, that you hadn't wanted any more than we.

How can I reproach you all, where you showed courage, when five years ago they asked you with emphasis to join the army, because the leadership of a country, of which you hardly knew its existence, so bestially broke bounds?

Dear boy, of course your action sometimes was a little bit more rough and unpolished than we in the “old west” are accustomed to. But we shall never forget, boys, that with that same rough indifference your comrades fought to death near Nijmegen and Arnhem, while we still were suffering under the “bad Jerries.”

And do you know our dear Queen, her child and grandchildren are safely in our midst again? That was your work. We can say again what we like to say, we can write everything and we don't spare our statesmen our criticism, thanks to you. We are no more hungry, since we started to eat your biscuits and now eat tarts again; our trains and street cars go again, we have coals for our stoves and food for our children. That was your work.

And now, take to your Canadian country a good lasting memory of us, the gratitude of a nation that was itself again by your co-operation.

Once our grandchildren will ask us who liberated us and then we will say, many brave, gay boys with caps on their heads; we shall tell them all—much and much more than that Montreal and Ottawa are two big cities in Canada!

Godspeed, boys, and welcome home! Maybe you will see a tear in the eyes of your mother, your wife, your girl or your sister, but don't forget that a tear is a smile of the heart, and that same heart is beating in the small low-lying country near the sea, Holland, that will set down your name in the chronicles of its history.

In the name of thousands,
THE EDITORSHIP OF A DUTCH ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY, OUR FREE HOLLAND.

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