Sister Bonaventura/Sister Marie:
A lifetime of devotion to her family, her church and her missionary patients

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Cover art copied by permission from www.beeldbanko2.nl. Subject matter, four nuns praying in internment camp, about 1944. Watercolor. Image #192692
THE EARLY LIFE OF MARIA PILAGIA JACOBS

The island farm in the Netherlands [hereafter referred to as NL] on which Maria Pilagia Jacobs was born is named “Groenewoud” [Greenwood in English] but the image of pastoral peace that that name conveys was probably shaken up quite often. Peter and Johanna Jacobs lived there and they had a huge family (16 surviving children of 19 born) so there were many mouths to feed, a host of chores to be done and piles of laundry to do. In today’s terms, running the Jacobs household was probably like running a small business at capacity, 365 days per year.

There was nothing laid back about this family. Peter rented and ran his farm, and dabbled in local politics. His family worshipped in the Catholic church (Mary of the Assumption) that his father (Jacobus), as a founding member, helped organize in Achthuizen. Johanna Jacobs-Buijs was the daughter of a windmill operator, so she undoubtedly grew up helping her parents with the milling operation. After marriage, she had a large family and worked long hours running a household and nurturing the Catholic faith in her family. No doubt, Peter

Groenewoud today, family photo. Combination barn and house building. Date on roof rafter of the house--1737

Windlust ("Wind love"), is a flour windmill in Achthuizen, Oostflakkee, South Holland, Netherlands. Taken from https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Windlust,_Achthuizen
and Johanna would have been pleased to see that the nuns who wrote Maria’s obituary called this a “very solid family.”

All the Jacobs progeny were born between 1889 and 1911. [See the Appendix, p. 44 for a P. Jacobs family listing] Of those children, three became priests. Father Pete was a Trappist monk and stayed in the NL. Father Anton was a Franciscan missionary who worked and died in Brazil. Father Leonard was a Mill Hill missionary who worked and died in the Cameroons, Africa. Maria Pilagia became Sister Bonaventura, a Sister of Charity of St. Charles Borromeo. Her 40-year career as a midwife was spent in Indonesia. The remaining years of her vocation were spent near the Motherhouse in Maastricht, NL. The rest of the children had careers related to farming-ranching, dairy, baking, homemaking and medicine. Jane helped raise her brothers and sisters and then married and continued as a homemaker. She became a mother of five. Leo took over the farm at Groenewoud. Gerard trained as a baker in the NL and was a member of the underground in WWII. Tonni became a nurse. Eventually, eight boys from the Jacobs family immigrated to the United States, beginning with Jake in 1911. These men all worked in agriculture, including Gerard who immigrated with his family in 1947.

The Groenewoud farm is on Goeree-Overflakke [pronounced yu’re ‘ɔvərfla,ke.] This hyphenated name for the island is due to the fact that it was two separate islands until the

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Statendam was built in 1751. It is a Maas River delta island in South Holland, but a Wikipedia illustration\(^2\) shows its location in relation to the rest of the NL and says that, in scenery and dialect, this area is more closely related to Zeeland than to Holland. There were four municipalities on this island before it was merged into one, in 2013. Those places were Goedereede, Dirksland, Middleharnis and Oostflakkee (East Flakke.) Den Bommel village, the location of the Jacobs farm is in this last municipality. Ooltgensplaat, Oude-Tonge and Achthuizen are other nearby villages familiar to relatives who have visited the Jacobs homeland. Potato and onion farming are primary cash crops on the island but income sources in modern time include fishing and port work, shopping in Middleharnis, plus boating, tourism and tulip bulb farming.

Queen Wilhelmina was the monarch of the NL from 1880-1962, so the popular queen was the head of government during the childhoods of all the Jacobs children and beyond. During the early 20\(^{th}\) Century the NL still relied on its colony, the Dutch East Indies (DEI) (Indonesia today) for agriculture, oil and mining products.) The accompanying map shows how this colony expanded in 150 years.\(^3\) Actually, the NL had been in this area of the world quite early. The early 20\(^{th}\) Century was a time of flux in the NL and Europe. Populations grew, as death rates fell. Lands opened up. By 1919 women voted

\(^3\) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Netherlands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Netherlands)
in the NL. Industrialization brought new businesses and urban jobs, such as the Phillips
Corporation in Eindhoven. On the negative side, for the NL, WWI occurred from 1914-1918.
Although this country was officially neutral, Dutch people suffered through the four-year war.
Then, a worldwide Depression began in 1929 and it had “crippling effects on the Dutch
economy.”

The Jacobs family suffered its own extreme hardship in 1911. The last of the Jacobs
children, Maria Pilagia, was born on April 28. About two weeks later (May 14), Maria’s mom,
Johanna Quirina, died of complications of childbirth. It is hard to fathom how such a large family
could continue without a mother. Peter must have had a strong personality to bear this loss. His
oldest daughter, Johanna Maria (Jane) was 18 years old in 1911 and she stepped up to help her father
raise her baby sister and the rest of the children.
Maria and her three year old sister, Tonni, probably only knew Jane as their mother. Maids and hired
help also helped the household continue.

When the Jacobs siblings were school-age, they walked to a Catholic school in Acthuizen for classes. Aegidius (Guy) remembered taking lard and sugar sandwiches for his lunch at school. He also remembered taking boiled eggs, one in each front pocket, to warm his hands on the walk to school. Then he could eat them as a snack later. Maria, (also known in the NL as Riet, Rietje and Marie to the U. S. family) may have attended this local school from the ages of 6-12 but she had to endure another drastic change when her sister, Jane, married in 1923. It is understood that Mattheus Koenraadt agreed to allow

4 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Netherlands
Jane to bring her sisters, Maria and Tonni, into the marriage. The load might have been lightened for the new family, however, because Jacobs family member, Dorothé Knaven-Raising (shown here talking to an Indonesian woman during a trip there, in 2001) said Maria, and probably Tonni, went to a Catholic boarding school. Dorothé speculated that this experience may have caused Maria to decide to go into the sisterhood. The order Maria eventually chose to enter has a teaching wing and a medical wing, so those sisters might have been her teachers in her teen years.
By 1929, Maria decided to join the Sisters of Charity of St. Charles Borromeo [hereafter abbreviated as the CBsisters.] This order is headquartered in the ancient city of Maastricht. She took the name Sister Bonaventura, which means good fortune in Italian, when she professed her vows on May 14, 1931. This picture shows Sister Bonaventura in full habit. There are notations in a career timeline provided by her cloister [see Appendix, p. 43 for a re-creation of this timeline and other dates] that Sister was in Nijmegen in 1931 and Schiedam in 1932. She probably obtained her medical training, to qualify as a midwife, in those places. After that, Sister Bonaventura was sent to the missions in the Dutch East Indies to join her fellow sisters and practice her new profession. Some people have said Sister Bonaventura left Europe at age 18. Laureen thinks she probably spent 3 years training, travelling and later, acculturating before she wholeheartedly began her medical work.

Sister Bonaventura’s first assignment is dated June 8, 1934 in Bandung, Dutch East Indies (DEI.) She was 23 years old. Sister was a midwife in the DEI and then in the independent country of Indonesia for forty years (1934-1974.) The majority of the rest of this family paper will speculate about her active working life, especially during the WWII years.

A short history of Sister’s religious order follows.

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The order that Maria entered was solely Dutch when it began in 1837 but eventually the order spread to many places around the world. Elisabeth Gruyters (1798-1864) was the founder of the CBsisters. The Napoleonic siege of Europe occurred in Gruyters’ lifetime. She was raised in a Roman Catholic household so she would have been badly affected by the Napoleonic army’s abolishment of convents and by the repression of the Catholic faith.

When she was a young adult, Elisabeth went to Belgium to work as a housekeeper. The family she worked for was only 18 kilometers away from Maastricht, NL, where she was born. During Elisabeth’s time off from her job, she started going to nearby hospitals to pray rosaries with the sick. Eventually she committed herself to a career helping people. With the aid of a local priest, Elisabeth established the CBsisters on April 29, 1837. She and the nuns who came with her and after her dedicated themselves to the care of the sick and destitute and to helping educate the poor. The CBsisters spread all over the NL, establishing schools, hospitals, homes and orphanages. Mission work for this order was part of their expansion. The first work the CBsisters did outside Europe was in the Dutch colony of the Dutch East Indies (DEI) [now Indonesia] in 1918. This picture shows the first 10 sisters who worked in their first hospital near Tanjung Priok, in Jakarta. From 1918
until 1929, the CBsisters were only permitted to work with the Dutch inhabitants of Batavia (Java.) In 1930 though, they were finally permitted to work with local people, as well. The nuns established hospitals in Batavia, Bandung and Yogyakarta. Javanese patients were placed in their own wards and their healthcare was intentionally affordable.

By 1933, the Dutch order in the DEI began taking in local young women as novitiates. They joined the same order as the Dutch nuns but did not have equal opportunities in their work. Chinese and Javanese women entered the order but the Dutch colonial government restricted their education. For instance, local novitiates became nursing assistants, rather than nurses. They were not administrators or managers. They had to learn Dutch and eat a typical Dutch diet. Convent life for the CBsisters in Asia was just like it was in Europe. In some ways it was admirable that the Dutch nuns helped these local women out of poverty but the new sisters were limited with what they could do in the order. One good change for all the nuns in the DEI was that they started wearing white habits, rather than traditional black, since it was more suitable to the tropical environment. By 1940, there were 155 sisters in the DEI-108 Dutch nuns, including Sister Bonaventura, and 47 locally-born nuns.

The organization that the Dutch nuns set up in the DEI, however, changing radically during and after the Japanese takeover of the islands in WWII (March 1942-August 15, 1945.) All Dutch citizens were rounded up and put in internment camps. Men were separated from the women and children. The Dutch nuns were confined in camps in Java and Sumatra. [Theo Jacobs, a Dutch cousin, believes Sister Bonaventura was taken on Java.] This paper will soon deal with the effects of the Japanese internment of prisoners in WWII. The following quote from a telegram sent by one of the CBsisters to the Motherhouse in the NL, in 1943, is a small piece of

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6 Information by e-mail, Theo Jacobs to Pete and Laureen Jacobs, March 21, 2017.
evidence describing the sisters’ experience in a POW camp. It was written by Sister Laurentia de Sain from Palembang, DEI on April 17, 1943-very early in the internment period. “I am here together with Sister Catherinia, Sister Timothée, Sister Paulie, Sister Rumolda and Sister Theresetta. The others live in the camp of Bengkoelen. We are all happy and healthy. There is plenty of work. We help the women and children. Life is always beautiful and worthwhile, but especially the present time is praiseworthy. There are many causes for gratitude, if one manages to keep considering things in a transcendental way. We have no information about the sisters on Java. Yours sincerely, Sister Laurentia, women’s camp, Palembang.”

There was a lot that could not be said in this telegram. It is amazing that it got through and there is still a record of it.

The native CBsisters were not jailed with the Dutch nuns. They were allowed to continue their work. Since they were on their own, they soon had to develop their own way of religious life and everyday work. Thirty-six of these sisters were all together in Central Java. They carried on their work in two hospitals (Yogykarta and Ganjuran), in an orphanage and in a school. They adapted their habits. They spoke Javanese and ate local food. They had to cope with shortages of money, food and medicine, throughout the occupation period.

Both the Dutch and the Javanese nuns had to submit to a “rapid and radical evolution” forced on them by the Japanese occupation forces. When reunification happened in mid-1945, the order’s missionary work gradually resumed but did not continue smoothly. There was a new order to the missionary way of life for the CBsisters. The native sisters wanted some recognition

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8 Ibid. p. 199
for what they accomplished in the war’s 3½ years. The Dutch sisters wanted to revert to their pre-war life.

A war for independence was led by native leader Sukarno, who was promised great things by the Japanese, post-war, but that did not occur, so he led a rebellion that continued until 1949, when the Dutch conceded. Everyday life in postwar PEI was threatened by violence. The colonial administration failed and terrorist acts occurred.

Sukarno, taken from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sukarno

At this same time, in the case of the CBsisters, a local monsignor translated cloister rules to Javanese. The singing of Dutch songs was prohibited and no European holidays were celebrated. Between 1945 and 1960, the Indonesian CBsisters took all the leading positions in their convents. The old ways of their religious life was gone.

Sister Bonaventura was one of the Dutch missionaries who had to adapt to this great change. She was, by all accounts, quiet and humble. Except for a couple postwar trips to the NL, Sister remained in-country until 1974. Laureen believes Sister Bonaventura lived with all the changes, doing her work, all the while praying for the strength to do her job well. She served her people and her God.

Vatican II declared some changes to the mission role of the Catholic Church, emphasizing respect for native culture. The CBsisters were on the forefront of that directive. After the war, and the independence of Indonesia, the CBsisters worked as Catholic Church members, not as Dutch citizens. By 2000, only 3 Dutch sisters remained in Indonesia.
The Dutch have a long history as colonizers in Indonesia. By the time the independent Indonesian government forced all Europeans out by 1958, the Dutch had been in these islands for 350 years. It truly “had become a second homeland to them.”

1596 marked the first Dutch contact in Indonesia. They found a sea route to the Indian archipelago. This is somewhat remarkable, considering that there was no Dutch state until the 16th Century. The Netherlanders quickly prospered in trade and shipping. The islands they found were at the crossroads of main sea lanes. The Portuguese were already in that same area, trying to establish themselves but the Dutch were better sailors and traders. The Dutch eventually defeated them. The first core areas of Dutch control were Java, Bali and Lombok.

Although they were new to that area of the world, “many Dutch men were absolutely convinced of the basic propriety of their right to rule” the islands of Indonesia. The high colonial period was in the mid to late 19th Century. The Dutch brought wheat and iron ore on their ships and made the return trip with coffee, sugar, indigo and spices [nutmeg, mace, cloves, pepper.] Among other business associations, some Dutch traders formed The United East India Company,

The Dutch also defeated the local Sultanate of Aceh in 1874. The Muslim religion spread throughout the islands in the 15th Century. This was primarily accomplished by Chinese Navy

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men who were Muslim, as well as by traders from India. Dutch missionary efforts were never very successful because of the local high regard for the Muslim religion.

The Dutch colonizers pauperized local Indonesians, making them maids, laborers and forcing farmers to sell their products at fixed government prices. Within the islands there was very little improvement in transportation while the Dutch were in charge.

By the 20th Century, Indonesians were discontent with the Dutch but their liberators, the Japanese, temporarily brought worse conditions onto them. How did the Japanese become interested in the Dutch East Indies? Previous to 1940, U. S. President Franklin Roosevelt embargoed scrap iron, steel and oil from the Japanese. FDR thought this action might stop Japanese aggression but it had the opposite effect. The DEI was known as an oil rich location, so the Japanese went for it.

The Dutch homeland fell to the Germans in 1940. The Dutch government in exile, in London, worked to cut off its oil supplies to Japan but that didn’t stop the Japanese from invading the DEI. In two months, the DEI fell to the Japanese on March 8, 1942. There were some Dutch and allied attempts to save the DEI but the allies lost in the Battle of the Java Sea. Some resisting Dutch colonials destroyed oil installations in Palembang and poured the oil onto a river and lit it afire but that did very little good, overall. Besides oil, the Japanese took over maritime facilities, and confiscated rubber, tin, quinine and agricultural products. These natural resources were plundered for the Japanese homeland and for occupied Manchuria.

In their strategy, the Japanese intended to conquer India and Australia, too, but their plans were crippled after their terrible naval losses in the WWII battles of Leyte Gulf and Midway.

At the initial invasion of the DEI, locals welcomed the Japanese as liberators. The conquerors talked a big story and included the islands in their Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity
Sphere. The Japanese told resistance fighters such as Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta that they were guaranteed a postwar role in their homeland. That was a false promise, however. When the war ended, the Dutch were allowed to reinstall their government in Batavia but it had a weak hold on postwar DEI. The resistant Indonesians used a skill taught them by the Japanese, guerilla warfare, against the Dutch. A three year fight for independence ensued. One of the Jacobs relatives told a family story, by email that occurred at this time in Indonesia. Jan Koenraadt (son of Jane Koenraadt-Jacobs) “was sent by the Dutch government as a Dutch soldier to Indonesia. There he was wounded by a bomb and landed in a hospital in Bandung (city in Java.) Tante Rietje [Sister Bonaventura] took care of him as a nurse because he was in her hospital. She wrote a letter to her eldest sister Jane to tell her that he was still alive and well recovered…the whole family was very relieved.”

By 1949, the Dutch lost control of their colony and had no international support from the UN or the United States for their continue rule. Independence was declared.

For the entire 3.5 years of Japanese rule in the DEI, the Dutch were sent to internment camps. Locals and Axis allied people stayed in their communities. The Dutch prisoners suffered badly in 174 POW camps. They had high casualty rates due to starvation and related diseases. It is estimated that 4 million people died in the DEI (locals and colonials) due to famine and forced labor. By the end of the war, Japan had erased most of the evidence of Dutch influence. “The Indonesians had learned to live without colonialism and Dutch were not welcome on the islands. For them [Indonesians,] now that the weed had been eradicated by the Japanese, they did not want roots to take hold again.”

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11 Information by email, Dorothé Knaven-Rasing to Laureen Jacobs, April 22, 2017.
12 *Thief of Glory*, ibid, p. 250.
THE KNOWN FACTS ABOUT SISTER BONAVENTURA’S WWII AND INTERNMENT EXPERIENCE

(3.5 years)

Before getting into the research of what happened to Dutch citizens in the DEI, in the period of the Japanese takeover, it is beneficial to look at the few known facts concerning Sister Bonaventura’s time there.

According to cloister records, Sister was stationed in the DEI from June 8, 1934 until March 1974. The places in the DEI she worked during the war were Bandung, Bengkulu, Bandung again, Gandjuran, the Japanese internment camps, and then Tjitjadas. Sister Bonaventura was a trained midwife and, according to her obituary published by her order, Sister helped deliver over 30,000 babies in her medical career. The same obituary said she was “always there for others.”

By email, Theo Jacobs related that Sister Bonaventura was taken to a POW camp in East Java. As we will see later, Japanese prisoners were moved repeatedly throughout their internments, so Sister most likely lived in several camps from 1942-1945. When asked about the Jappenkamp [the name given Japanese POW camps, by the Dutch] life, by her nephew Theo Jacobs, Sister Bonaventura (known as Sister Marie by her U. S. relatives) responded she “had been treated well… [and that she] cared for children” there. This is a pretty typical response by a veteran of WWII. Many were quite reticent about their experiences and didn’t share details. They answered questions but did not often tell stories of their time in the camps. The only hint of

14 Information by Theo Jacobs email, IBID.
what she had gone through, again in her obituary, is that after the war “her body was never the same.”15

Through Dorothé Knaven-Rasing’s email, we know in 1946 Sister Bonaventura took care of her nephew Jan Koenraadt in the Borromeus hospital in Bandung, PEI.16 In that same year, she made her first trip back to the NL on a ship of sick people. In that trip, she visited with her “mother” Jane in Medenblik and with other family members. In a later visit (1955) Sister’s oldest brother, Jacobus (Jake) went back to the NL to meet her for the first time. Jake emigrated to the U. S. in 1911 but before Maria was born.

We also know that Sister Bonaventura kept in touch with some of the children she cared for in the Jappenkamps. Her religious order took war orphans from the camps back to Europe to search for living relatives. Theo Jacobs’ comment about Sister’s lingering interest in this effort was that Sister Bonaventura donated her pocket money to a war orphan organization.17 This non-profit may have been the Kinderen uit de Japanse Bezetting en de Bersiap 1941-1949.18 This organization was set up to assist children who had been interned in the Far East.

In Sister Herma’s obituary tribute to her colleague, she wrote “a lifetime of hard work and time in prison camps were not able to weaken her (Sister Bonaventura’s) spiritual strength.”19 She must have been a remarkable, dedicated religious woman.

15 Zuster Bonaventura obituary, IBID.
16 Information from Dorothé Knaven-Rasing email, IBID.
17 Information by Theo Jacobs email, IBID.
19 Zuster Bonaventura obituary, IBID.
CHARACTERISTICS OF WWII INTERNMENT OF PRISONERS ON DEI

The following section of writing gathers facts about the Jappenkamp experience, so following generations in the Jacobs family can understand what Sister Bonaventura went through to survive such a difficult time. It does not necessarily detail her own experience but that of others like her.

To help her understand this better, Laureen researched the details of everyday life in these jails. Most of the facts came from two sources. One is a Dutch website. In English it is the East Indies Camp Archives [indischekamparchieven.nl] which is sponsored by the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD.) The other, especially helpful source, is a non-fiction book, *Women Beyond the Wire: a story of prisoners of the Japanese, 1942-1945*. It was published in 1982, in Great Britain. This latter source was the re-creation of the experiences of British and Australian nurses who fled Singapore, only to be imprisoned on Java. Later, Dutch women—both civilian and religious—and children joined them in the POW camps. The book was derived from diary material, interviews with former internees, written firsthand accounts of survivors and material from the Federation of Far Eastern Prisoners of War. Lavinia Warner, the primary author of this book, also walked the Indonesian areas where the former camps existed, with a nun survivor who was still serving in Indonesia in 1975.

More supplemental research material helped round out the overall impressions of this terrible time period in history.
DETAILS OF EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE JAPPENKAMPS

First of all, where were the camps in the DEI? The Japanese did not build internment camps. They took over facilities and reused them for their purposes. In cities, they used former Dutch homes and estates, jails, military barracks and at least one movie theater. In cities and jungle areas, they turned schools, monasteries, convents and hospitals into jails for their internees.

The Dutch, Australian and European prisoners were civilian and military. The Japanese had no professional respect for military men who surrendered to them. They thought defeated military men had no dignity and women were just “useless mouths.” Under their rule, men and women prisoners were separated.

Civilian and military men [and boys over age 12] were in their own camps. The men were forced to work on heavy labor infrastructure projects, such as railroads, harbors and airfields, at least in the beginning of the internment period. Women collected water and sewed for the Japanese Army and for themselves. Women also labored on farms and gardens. The latter work became especially important near the end of the war because of severe cutbacks in food rationing. Near the end of the war, a British observer of the camps, Gideon Jacobs [no relation] said that internees “had no clothes anymore.” This picture of a young Dutch boy in a Jappenkamp relays that observation.

Both sexes of internees had to fetch rations, prepare their own food, chop wood, repair their huts or quarters, work in the latrines and wash clothes with filthy well water. The Japanese did virtually no manual labor in any of the camps. Later in the war, according to material in *Women Beyond the Wire*, women had to make coffins and transport and bury their dead.

The administration of the Jappenkamps were, at first, run by the military. Then, for a time, they were run by civilians, before reverting to the military administration known as Gunseikanbu. The Japanese earned their reputation for brutality in their POW camps. In one fictional source, the Japanese commandant of a camp severely kicked a pregnant woman. Punishments for small infractions might be exposure in the hot tropical climate, without water. Early in the war, Japanese executed any prisoners who attempted to escape. That probably accounts for so few attempts to leave Jappenkamps. There was also the fact that Europeans in “town” could not fit in with locals or hide easily. Major Gideon Jacobs, a camp liberator at war’s end, also noted “prisoners so undernourished would, it was thought, be incapable of insurrection.”

The Japanese never abided by the rules of the Geneva Convention and, during the war, they rarely allowed any Red Cross messages and no care packages were distributed. Red Cross packages were eventually handed out after the final defeat. In the meantime, the Japanese controlled their prisoners with fear and deprivation.

For an overall impression of what life was like, in general in the DEI, there is a video clip called “Go Back in Time” (Subtitle ‘War Camp’) on the website [http://thiefofglory.com](http://thiefofglory.com). This clip shows Japanese, Indonesian Muslims, POW men working on a project and women internees

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22 *Prelude to the Monsoon*, IBID, p. 98.
dealing with existence in the camps. There are no explanations given for what is on the screen, but the film helps record this tragic wartime period.

Food was a major issue throughout the Jappenkamps. The longer the war went on, the less food everyone received. Some of the reasons for this was that the cost of living rose, as the war dragged on, and the Japanese did not increase the allotted amount of money per prisoner in their military budgets.

One of the comments made in *Women Beyond the Wire* was that when the Dutch came to the camps, they were relatively well off. That was only a temporary advantage since money soon ran out after buying food and supplies on the Black Market. Their cash became valueless when the currency was replaced. Even if the Dutch had tried to get to their money, their bank accounts were frozen and their material assets were seized. Some Allied and Dutch women managed to save a few personal items, such as jewelry, which they sold to black marketeers for food or medicine, during their internment.

One of the descriptions of food rations and their dispersal in *Women Beyond the Wire* was that occasionally meat rations were thrown off trucks, controlled by the Japanese. This meat was allowed to be eaten by dogs and vermin before the women could retrieve it. “Certainly this gave the air of feeding the animals—designed for...
Rice was the main staple but even that turned out to be trashy. Vegetable rations were remainders and often rotten or slimy. In one fictional account, whenever they could, children retrieved slugs and snails for protein. Overall, the diets of all internees lacked protein and Vitamin B. Slow starvation ran amok through all the camps. Near the end of the war, this regimen took the most severe toll on the elderly and children. The lack of nutrition caused diseases such as diphtheria, beriberi, malaria and typhoid fever. “The camps of the women in Sumatra, Borneo, Java and the Philippines were never to achieve lasting fame or notoriety, although in terms of mortalities, they produced the death-toll of a major battle.”

Despite being in the tropics, water was a rare commodity to camp internees. Wells and streams were sparse and overcrowding caused water sources to run dry. The Japanese also cut off water supplies for long periods in some camps, to increase prisoner distress. Clothes had to be washed in filthy water. Soap was virtually not available for clothes washing or personal hygiene.

The barracks or camps were usually surrounded by barbed wire and the Japanese sometimes employed large Korean guards. Watchtowers were built to oversee the camps. The Japanese had harassment techniques such as roll call (tenko in Japanese.) Prisoners were given personal numbers in Japanese, which they were required to memorize and recite daily. Roll calls happened 2

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23 Women Beyond the Wire, IBID. p. 196.
24 IBID. p. 16
or 3 times a day and sickness was not considered an excuse to be absent. Internees were physically counted, over and over, until the Japanese were satisfied. These sessions often happened under the hot sun. In some cases, the prisoners were required to sing the Japanese National Anthem and bow to the emperor, facing east. There were also inspections of the prisoners’ quarters and their personal items. Looting the internees’ goods was common. In the case of the prisoners written about in Women Beyond the Wire, the internees were also made to sign declarations that they would not break free from their camp.²⁵

Toilet facilities were very crude and demeaning, as well. There was no privacy in the overcrowded camps. This lack of personal space also extended to the bed situation. Prisoners, especially near the end of the war, were forced into small spaces or communal concrete beds or troughs.

Internees were not allowed books or writing materials of any kind. Diaries were not permitted but a few missives still survived the war. Early in the war, some postcard and telegram messages were allowed, as we saw earlier in Sister Laurentia’s note, but they were limited in the number of words permitted and some mailed messages took over a year to arrive.

In Women Beyond the Wire, during a period of uninterrupted incarceration, the women created choirs, wrote poetry and music, shared recipes to mentally allay hunger and held religious services. The nuns would have come to the forefront on that but a British missionary also held services for a time. Some women thought these services were “respite from a day otherwise dedicated entirely to grubbing.”²⁶ In some camps, orphans and unattended children started forming into gangs. In at least one case, a teaching nun started school classes to keep the

²⁵ Women Beyond the Wire, IBID, p. 305.
²⁶ Women Beyond the Wire, IBID, p. 209.
children busy. All this extra effort helped the adult women form an “extraordinary sisterhood”\textsuperscript{27} but as the war drug on, the inter-cultural sharing came to a stop as starvation, disease and movements from one camp to another caused problems. The women survivors said there was “seemingly motiveless movement of the prisoners from place to place”\textsuperscript{28} Disparate groups formed and Major Gideon Jacobs, the British Army officer sent to relieve the camps in the post-war, noticed the internees were not getting along well after war’s end. They had cultural differences, after all, since they had come from Britain, the NL, Australia, Canada, America and there were Malays and other Asians. They had also endured starvation and $3\frac{1}{2}$ years of hell.

\textsuperscript{27} IBID, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{28} IBID, p. 132
80,000 men, women and children of Dutch descent were taken prisoner by the Japanese, in the DEI, in 1942. Of those people, at least 10,000 died in POW camps. Statistics relate grim facts but stories help us relate to what happened to these people. We do not have a good record of what happened to Sister Bonaventura, during this time, but we do have documented stories of people from her religious order who shared this wartime experience.

The book *Women Beyond the Wire* primarily discusses the wartime lives of British and Australian nurses and civilians who fled Singapore when Japan invaded. The nurses and civilians fled on small ships, heading for the Dutch East Indies, which they didn’t believe had been conquered yet. Many of these people were bombed on their ships and literally swam for their lives to Banka Island. The attached map shows the location of some of the camps discussed in this non-fiction book. The first British civilians and nursing sisters associated with the Royal Naval Services (or QARANC, Queen Alexandra’s Royal Army Nursing Corps) who arrived on shore were brutally slaughtered by Japanese forces. One woman who survived these murders later testified

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29 *Prelude to the Monsoon*, IBID.

Map scanned from Jacobs’ *Prelude to the Monsoon*. 

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about her experience at Japanese War Crimes trials. The second and remaining waives of Singapore refugees were promptly taken into custody. Men were separated from women and children and the latter group were first taken to Muntok, where they were stuffed into a barracks that had been converted from a movie theater. The shocked Brits and Aussies spent two weeks there. The next camp the women and children went to, in March 1942, was in Palembang, on Irenelaan Road. Later, the women found out the men prisoners were incarcerated nearby. The men were spotted as they went out on work details. A map of another camp is included here, to see how one camp was set up by the Japanese.

At the Palembang camp, the European and Pacific women were joined by Dutch civilians and religious. There were also reports of nuns being sent to Makassar and some Jesuit priests, originally from Oudenbosch, were sent to Bandung. All the Dutch colonials and Dutch religious such as the CBsisters and Protestant missionaries were eventually rounded up by the victorious Japanese. The interned women who arrived by ship and the ocean had few personal effects. The Dutch brought one small suitcase with them, so they initially had some material advantages. All the colonials (Dutch and British) lost the prestige they had enjoyed before the war. They went from being in the elite in society, to being paupers. Lavinia Warner called this a “cataclysmic levelling.”

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30 Women Beyond the Wire, IBID, p. 199.
At one time there were more than 400 women and children in the Palembang camp—way too many people for a small space. Women of different cultures suddenly had to get along. One former prisoner said, “One learnt to live with and understand people better. The old order of politeness broke down and one got to the bare bones of living.”31 Co-ops eventually developed among the women. They were called “kongai” and people in these groups had better chances for survival than lone individuals.

The nuns who entered the Palembang camp had no prestige to lose but they lost their way of life and their missionary work. The sisters mentioned in Warner’s book were the Sisters of Charity of St. Charles Borromeo—Sister Bonaventura’s order. The first CBsisters who came to Palembang came from Lahat. When the war changed their world, the confused 25 teaching nuns first travelled from Lahat to Palembang, then back to Lahat. The Japanese then took them and forced them to go to Benkulen, before sending them to the women’s Jappenkamp in Palembang. No wonder confusion reigned. The Mother Superior of these teaching nuns was Sister Laurentia. She was described as “tall…grave but kindly…[with a] memorably enchanting smile.” 32 Sister Catherinia was also in this group and we will hear more about her soon. Some medical nuns from the CBsisters came to the Palembang camp. They had been working at the Charitas Hospital in Talang Djawa, in East Sumatra. Their head sister was Mother Alacoque. By September 1943, there were 50 nuns with all the other women and children in Palembang. In 1944, 12 more nuns

31 *Women Beyond the Wire*, IBID, p. 8.
32 IBID, p. 201.
joined this group. Sister Bonaventura could have been in any of these groups—that is, if she came to be on Sumatra, rather than Java.

The time spent in the Palembang camp was the most stable time for all the civilian, military and religious women and children. This does not mean their lives were not miserable but at least they didn’t have to travel to a new camp for awhile. In fact, the Japanese did make all these people move in 1943 but they didn’t go far. They moved into what had been the Men’s Camp in Palembang. When the mostly civilian men were forced to move on, they didn’t understand that anyone else would be using their camp, so they trashed the water well and destroyed some of the camp construction. They didn’t want the Japanese to re-use the area.

When the women moved into the camp, they had to remove the objects in the well and adapt to the new space as well as they could. The women performed necessary daily tasks, including wood chopping. This was a particularly hard job to perform, without any modern tools such as axes or saws. Instead, they laboriously chopped wood with local farm implements.

In 1944, the group moved back to Muntok. 112 people died in that move. At Muntok, the water well ran dry within a week. The everyday existence of the internees was miserable.

In 1945, the group was moved to the jungle at Loebok Linggau. The Japanese forced the women to do all the heavy hauling on these trips and that, plus fever and disease, took a heavy toll on the internees.

As previously mentioned, the water supplies were always sparse and one of the internees’ tedious tasks was to haul water for themselves, in whatever containers they found. In 1944, the women were made to carry water for baths to Japanese military quarters.

The British and Australian nurses gave the best medical care to their fellow prisoners, that they could, in the circumstances. They were limited by lack of medicine, clean water and
protein rich food. They suffered starvation with the rest of the camp. By 1945, camaraderie was next to impossible. As Major Jacobs later said, it “would take a long time to restore the inmates to any semblance of humanity.\(^{33}\)

In the earlier Palembang encampment, when the women were relatively strong, in body and mind, the internees found time for some muted celebrations (for Queen Wilhelmina’s birthday [Dutch], for St. George’s Day [British], and even for the birthday of Emperor Hirohito [Japan].) Religious services were sometimes held on Sundays. The CBsisters and the Protestant missionary, Margaret Dryburgh performed this task. This same lady also wrote poetry for religious praise, for funerals and for herself. Later in camp, the musically talented people, such as Norah Chambers, sometimes wrote music for Dryburgh’s poetry. A choir of internees sang a capella music for these creations. One of Dryburgh’s works became a camp hymn, which had lasting meaning for all the Jappenkamp inhabitants. The song is reproduced here in its entirety.

**The Captives’ Hymn**
By Margaret Dryburgh, 1942

Father in captivity  
We would lift our prayer to Thee,  
Keep us ever in Thy Love.  
Grant that daily we may prove  
Those who place their trust in Thee,  
More than conquerors may be.

Give us patience to endure,  
Keep our hearts serene and pure,  
Grant us courage, charity,  
Greater faith, humility,  
Readiness to own Thy Will,  
Be we free or captive still.

For our country we would pray,  
In this hour be Thou her stay.

Pride and selfishness forgive,  
Teach her, by Thy Laws, to live,  
By Thy Grace may all men see,  
That true greatness comes from Thee.

For our loved ones we would pray,  
Be their guardians, night and day,  
From all dangers, keep them free,  
Banish all anxiety.  
May they trust us to Thy care,  
Know that Thou our pains doth share.

May the day of freedom dawn,  
Peace and justice he reborn,  
Grant that nations loving Thee  
O’er the world by brothers be,  
Cleansed of suffering, know rebirth,  
See Thy Kingdom come on earth.\(^{34}\)

\(^{33}\) *Prelude to the Monsoon*, IBID, p. 91.  
\(^{34}\) Taken from *Women Beyond the Wire*.  

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Musical composer internee Norah Chambers remembered the CBsisters singing this song to her, as she left the camp after liberation. At Christmas in 1943, Mother Laurentia led singing in a combined Dutch/English choir. In 1944, the Japanese banned singing, saying war was a serious business. In doing this, they removed any fragment of comfort to the women prisoners.\textsuperscript{35}

When starvation took its toll, many of these cultural touches went by the wayside. They were not forgotten, though.

Early in the incarceration period, the CBsisters ran the Catholic, Charitas Hospital in Talang Djawa. As long as they were able, the nuns continued to help the local and Jappennkamp sick and dying. Mother Alacoque believed the Japanese would eventually shut the hospital down. One of the first signs of that was when, in late 1942, the nuns had to vacate the new hospital for their small, former quarters. Throughout this period, Mother Alacoque and the civilian medical staff allowed the hospital to be used to exchange messages between camps and other “devious conduct, using the inviable recesses of their habits to transfer considerable quantities of drugs, medicines and even surgical instruments.”\textsuperscript{36} Beside letters and parcels, the hospital nuns allowed a local bishop to pass bulletins on to the men’s camp. A few married couples were able to briefly meet in a public restroom in the hospital. Author Warner said “the Dutch nursing nuns, gliding impassively about in their white habits, were the key to a smuggling operation on a grand scale.”\textsuperscript{37}

In another mention of the CBsisters medical nuns, “three of her (Mother Alacoque’s) nuns who were midwives provided a vital link to the outside world because their duties [early in the war] took them into the city without close supervision. Through them, Mother Alacoque,

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Women Beyond the Wire}, IBID. p. 304.
\textsuperscript{36} IBID, p. 169.
\textsuperscript{37} IBID, p. 272.
made wary by what had gone before, established hidden caches of drugs and medicines against the day when Charitas might be closed down on some sudden whim of the conquerors…”

Laureen would like to think that midwife Sister Bonaventura was one of those 3 sisters.

Before it was shut down completely, Mother Alacoque and several doctors paid a heavy price for the letter exchange and intrigue. Mother Alacoque was sentenced to 7 years in Japanese military prison. This was after days of interrogation, spent kneeling with her hands behind her and her head bare and bowed before the Kempei Tai.”[secret police] This happened to a sister described as a “lady of most gentle and pious appearance.” One of the doctors was beheaded. Another was sent to military prison. In September of 1943, a woman doctor named Goldberg was sent to the nearby women’s internment camp. She was a German Jew.

Some other short mentions of contributions of the medical nuns was that some of them blamed the beriberi disease that internees brought with them from Bengkulen, on their native cooking methods. Sister Rhynelda was pointed out as one of the nursing nuns. Another interned nun devoted herself to keeping remnants of palm oil, to treat tropical ulcers and infected mosquito bites. In one more mention of their medical work, the Dutch nuns got bedpans aboard ship, as the camp internees were moved to Loebok Linggau—“thus giving the sick and dying a little dignity.” 12 internees died during that wretched trip.

In late 1944, the medical nuns became “overwhelmed by the tide of illness and a roster was organized, dividing the pool of civilian and military nursing skill between the hospital and the ‘district nursing’ system in the blocks.”

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38 *Women Beyond the Wire*, IBID, p. 272.  
39 IBID, p. 315.  
40 IBID, p. 272.  
41 IBID, p. 430  
42 IBID, p. 403
3 weeks in December 1944. In the month of January 1945, 77 internee women died. “Mrs. Hinch and Mother Laurentia had to nag the Japanese for coffins.”  

Religion was important to many internees in the face of so much death and deprivation. “Sister Catherinia, though professionally dedicated of course to ‘that sort of thing’ offered the same conclusion: ‘You had not much time to pray because of everything that had to be done all day long. There was not much time to even think, but something grew in you—some trust, some knowing that God was near, and in that nearness you found the strength to go on. Just to go on hoping and trusting that things were going to be good again.’”

Early in the war, Sister Catherinia once described the children in the internment camps as pretty normal. Later, child gangs started forming and there was a short attempt to start school, to give order to the children’s lives. In the dying time, though, Sister Catherinia said “all creativeness and inventiveness went out of them…and they [the children] grew into seemingly old men and women.”

Sister Catherinia was often featured in Lavinia Warner’s book. Other camp internees noted her mechanical and building talents. Sister, a teacher by profession, fixed thatched rooves in the “men’s camp” experience. One of her fellow internees, Norah Chambers, remembered a day Sister was atop the British Jappenkamp huts, “barefoot and with her habit hitched up round her waist, straddling the roof with her veil blown out at right-angles by the wind. [Then] she lost her balance and slid down the roof and I had to catch her and hoist her up again. She muttered a

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43 *Women Beyond the Wire*, IBID, p. 405.
44 IBID, p. 418.
45 IBID, p. 424.
few things that were rather surprising to hear from a nun but, as ever with Catherinia, she ended up laughing. She had a philosophy of life that nothing could beat.”

Sister Catherinia hauled heavy cargo with the able internees during their last camp move. After a day of lading cargo onto the boat, “Sister Catherinia, rubber-legged with exhaustion, missed the gangplank on her final trip and had to be hauled out of the river.”

The author, Lavinia Warner, and Sister Catherinia knew each other. Warner went to Indonesia to research her project. Sister Catherinia was still living and working in Indonesia, although she was stationed in Java. She came back to Sumatra to show the author where the camps had been on Banka Island and Loebok Linggau. Sister didn’t cry but she became quiet and prayerful as she neared the areas where the women’s camps had been and where they buried their dead. The jungle had retaken most of the areas.

Certainly, for all the men, women and children who went through the experience of being interned by the Japanese, the WWII years were “no ordinary time.” Later, some of the camp survivors said they were shocked they survived and they felt they were “living on borrowed time.” The women colonials and nurses returned home, to a changed world. The CBsisters returned to their mission work, with short breaks to return to the Maastricht motherhouse.

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46 Women Beyond the Wire, IBID, pp. 337-338.
47 IBID, p. 393
49 Women Beyond the Wire, IBID, p. 498.
The Immediate Aftermath of Jappenkamp

By August of 1945, conditions in the Jappenkamps were desperate. Starvation and disease claimed the lives of many prisoners. Those that survived were often in stupors. They withdrew “into themselves”\(^\text{50}\) and many had “begun to lose hope.”\(^\text{51}\) Food became more and more scarce as the Japanese started losing the war. It was such that “even a banana skin became a delicacy.”\(^\text{52}\) There were no mugs or coffee cups or bars of soap to make life a little better. Existence was drudgery.

The Japanese surrendered on August 14, 1945, shortly after two atomic bombs were dropped on their homeland. The death and destruction in Japan put a quick halt to plans for Pacific hegemony. None of the internees in the POW camps knew any of this, until at least August 26. Even then, they could hardly react.

One of the first postwar Allied officers to deal with the people in the Jappenkamps was Major Gideon Francois Jacobs. He was a South African in the intelligence service of the British Army. Major Jacobs happened to be in an Officer’s Club with Admiral Louis Mountbatten. Eventually Jacobs met the Admiral and Mountbatten recognized his Afrikaans accent, which was derived from Dutch. The Allies knew Dutch people were interned in the DEI, so Jacobs’ intelligence job and his ability to be understood by Dutch people got him the job of relieving the prisoners in the Jappenkamps. Jacobs saw his “task not as a military

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\(^{50}\) Prelude to the Monsoon, IBID, p. 136.

\(^{51}\) IBID, p. 98.

\(^{52}\) IBID, p. 136.
operation but as an intensely humanitarian mission, entrusted [to him] by the civilized world.”

When he arrived in Sumatra, Jacobs knew he would have to work with the Japanese to find the imprisoned people. The entire world was trying to recover from years of war devastation. There would be no ships or airplanes or medical personnel to help the POWs for some time. Jacobs told the Japanese General Yoshida “I have been sent by Admiral Mountbatten to see you about the camps and need the assistance of the Nipponese. The people have suffered much.”

Major Jacobs found a Japanese soldier name Sodi who spoke Dutch because the man’s father had been Japanese ambassador to the Netherlands before the war. Jacobs, Sodi and another local man started going with Jacobs to the Jappenkamps to find the prisoners and start to relieve their destitute conditions. Jacobs did not trust the Japanese to tell him about all the camps and, indeed, local people helped him find some of the camps, but especially the jungle camp Loebok Linggau.

Jacobs was sadly shocked by what he found and heard in the overcrowded camps. He noticed lethargy in the internees and he saw the effect of starvation, plus he could see and smell the “filth and stench” of the camps. Jacobs began food drops to begin to correct the starvation. People who had been without enough protein for so long, often overate and became ill. The prisoners had to slowly put on weight and manage their diets.

Jacobs gave the men, in the first camp he relieved, blankets, thinking they would be grateful for the comfort. Later he found out that many of the inmates had bartered the blankets for food.

53 Prelude to the Monsoon, IBID, p. 129.
54 IBID, p. 88.
55 IBID, p. 111.
Major Jacobs talked to a dying prisoner who hung on to life until the man knew he had been freed. Jacobs promised the man he would “tell the world”\textsuperscript{56} the story of the men, women and children in the Jappenkamps. Later, Jacobs understood that the story of the Jappenkamps was “eclipsed by developments elsewhere.”\textsuperscript{57} It made him determined to write his retelling of the events in the DEI—which became the book, \textit{Prelude to the Monsoon}.

When Jacobs visited the camps, he heard about the terrible deaths on the Burma Railroad. He also heard about the murders on Banka Island and he took testimony for the Japanese war crime trials.

It is surprising to modern sensibilities but Jacobs made the POWs “remain in [their] camps.”\textsuperscript{58} There were no rescue groups available to help these malnourished people, right away and the political and military situation all over the PEI was terrible.

The early war promises of the Japanese to their Indonesian “brothers” faded immediately at war’s end. The Japanese did not hand over control to Sukarno and his counterparts. The Dutch tried to renew their colonial rule in Batavia but there was immediate pushback from Indonesians. Civil war ensued. The Dutch failed to understand they had lost control of the islands and would not get them back. Dutch and some British (Indian) troops were sent to fight the rebels. By November of 1946, there had been more than 2400 Allied casualties in the Indonesian war for independence. Various peace parlays were made but true independence for Sukarno’s Republican movement didn’t happen until Dec. 27, 1949.

The prisoners in the relief camps, sometimes guarded by Japanese troops, had to stay within the camp confines. In some cases, this took years. If the internees hadn’t stayed in the

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Prelude to the Monsoon}, IBID, foreword to the book.  
\textsuperscript{57} IBID, p. ix.  
\textsuperscript{58} IBID, p. 94.
camps, they would have been met by local freedom fighters. Many Indonesians were Muslim and anti-Catholic, plus they were decidedly anti-colonial. Jacobs thought his worst task was defending the people in the internment camps from local ambushes and violence. He also worried that the large Chinese population on the islands had to be protected because he thought Indonesians saw the Chinese as supportive of the Dutch colonizers.

The war death toll in Indonesia was estimated at 4 million people. 2.4 million of that number were casualties on the island of Java. Beside the world war and the civil war, Major Jacobs said he expected that “famine [for all] was just around the corner.”

The death toll in the Jappenkamps was horrific. In the Palembang camps, 55% of the men internees died. The British women, in their Palembang camp, died at a rate of 30%. 20% of the Dutch women prisoners died. Despite this, Major Jacobs found that the women’s spirits “even at the nadir in which he made his first contacts [were] noticeably higher than that of the men.”

Another matter to solve at war’s end was what to do with the orphaned children. At least in the Loebok Linggau camp, the difficult job of tracing the family members of the orphans was taken on by the CBsisters. Author Lavinia Warner said “those children slowly made the adjustment to normality…the last of the children left in March 1946.”

According to family recollection, Sister Bonaventura travelled back to the Netherlands by ship in 1946 with sick survivors, so she was probably directly involved in this effort with orphans. This may have been Sister’s first trip home since 1934. She left Europe, for the missions, during the worldwide Depression and returned home during the difficult WWII recovery.

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59 Prelude to the Monsoon, IBID, p. 169.
60 IBID, p. 478.
61 Women Beyond the Wire, IBID, p. 482.
After that trip to the Netherlands, Sister Bonaventura returned to her medical missionary work in Indonesia. Author Warner said “the nuns, as exemplars of a calling that makes sacrifice the starting point of a dedicated existence, were not afforded the catharsis of flying away from Sumatra and all its associations with these demanding years. Their task, precisely, was to remain where there was want and need and this they did, travelling no farther than Palembang where they [first] began the work of tending children orphaned by war.”

There were no tickertape parades for any of the former internees in the DEI. The Australians get home first and they got the best reception of all the groups. The British citizens went home by boat, when space was available. Most WWII veterans just wanted to “return to normal.”

The new normal was not always a happy situation. Some people’s psyches were ruined by their experiences. In the fiction book, *Thief of Glory/ Brouwer*, only 2 of 10 members of a blended Dutch family survived the war. One of the two brothers who lived became a drunk and drug addict. In *Women Beyond the Wire*, two teenage sisters returned postwar to Britain but they couldn’t force themselves to stay in school and their later marital relationships ended in divorce. The colonial Dutch and British couldn’t return to their government jobs in Asia or go back to their plantations or estates. The European influence in Singapore and Indonesia was effectively erased by the Japanese and the new governments. The surviving colonials had to start life over again. Young women and teens who were taken as sex slaves or ‘comfort women’ by the Japanese had to live with that horror the rest of their lives. In addition, many former prisoners had to recover from diseases such as malaria or diphtheria or beriberi.

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62 *Women Beyond the Wire*, IBID, p. 482.
63 IBID, p. 492.
The postwar life was difficult for all survivors but there was no public griping. People slowly recovered, in the best way they could, and went on with their lives.

We see something of this attitude in Sister Bonaventura’s obituary. Sister Herma made the statement, “a lifetime of hard work and time in prison camps were not able to weaken her [Sister Bonaventura’s] spiritual strength.” Her body was not the same, but she went on with her work and religious life.
Having survived the war, Sister Bonaventura returned to work, on the islands, in 1946. Early in that year she was, most likely, assigned to the St. Borromeus Hospital in Bandung, Java, because that is where she was reported nursing her nephew after a bombing attack by Indonesian rebels. Included in this text is a picture of the first, small Borromeus hospital built in 1920.

The size of the first hospital was probably due to the fact that the CBsisters first assigned to the DEI were only allowed to see to the medical needs of the Dutch residents. A year later, the sisters were allowed to care for local people as well and a new hospital was built. It is said that the hospital somewhat resembles the CB sisters’ monastery/cloister/motherhouse pictured on the right. Notice the arches throughout the pictures.

The name of the location of Java.

Map taken from bulcip.comule.com

Picture taken from old-indische.com/2013/11/borromeus-hospital-bandung-west-java.html

Pictures taken from https://www.pinterest.com/pin/313985405243559150/
the motherhouse is Onder de Bogen, which roughly translates to “under the curve” or “under the arch.” The new Borromeus hospital, which is still in existence, is pictured here. This building has probably been extensively renovated but it still retains the arched windows of the motherhouse area. The Borromeus Hospital has been renamed Panti Rapih Hospital. This name change occurred when the former Dutch names for things were forbidden after Indonesian Independence.

So, in 1946 Sister Bonaventura was working in the hospital again. Later in the year, she was allowed to return to the NL, on a transport ship of the sick from the DEI. Orphans may have been aboard, as well. We know from cousin Theo that when the ship arrived in Europe, Sister Bonaventura was allowed to visit her sister Jane in Medemblik. Evidently, Sister also wanted to visit the family farm in Den Bommel but her order refused that request. Theo thought that decision “inhuman” 64 considering what she had just gone through and that she had not been home since 1934.

After that trip home to the NL, Sister Bonaventura returned to her medical missionary work in Java. The convent obituary for Sister mentioned that she helped deliver many scores of babies while she was actively working. She must have been a very busy woman. In her 2013 trip to Indonesia, Dorothé Knaven-Rasing, talked to a colleague of Sister Bonaventura’s, who worked with her in Java. This nun said that Sister was “kind and professional.”65

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64 Information from Theo Jacobs email, IBID.
65 Information from Dorothé Knaven-Rasing email, IBID
The enclosed picture shows Dorothé looking at a group shot of CBsisters in their white habits, which included our Sister Bonaventura. This same relative included a picture of the “old” Borromeus hospital, which is attached to the newer building. Both pictures were sent by email.

Monastery records say that Sister Bonaventura returned to the Maastricht motherhouse in 1974. Theo said this was due to “her health and that the new government was not happy with the nuns.”

Dorothé also mentioned Sister had the “serious disease diabetes.”

After this, Sister devoted herself to a life of prayer in the NL. The Dutch family was allowed to visit her in Maastricht. Theo said his dad, Leo (Sister’s brother) and his mom, Jacoba Maria van Vugt and Tonni (Sister’s older sister) visited yearly. Later, Theo and his wife and some of their children visited Sister Bonaventura. Sometimes visiting family spent the night at the motherhouse and enjoyed breakfast before returning home. This was the case with Rina [Quirina] Rasing (Sister’s niece), Dorothé and Dorothé’s son.

We already heard about Uncle Jake’s 1955 visit to the NL to meet his youngest sister. Uncle Clarence also visited in the NL and saw Sister Bonaventura. When Joann Jacobs Perko was a college senior, she took a trip to the NL and remembered visiting with Sister Bonaventura.

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66 Information from Theo Jacobs email, IBID.
67 Information from Dorothé Knaven-Rasing email, IBID.
and Aunt Tonni. Joann knew Sister as Sister Marie. While there, Joann remembers visiting other Dutch family with Sister. She also like to play cards (an enduring Jacobs trait) and eat Indonesian food, such as Nasi goring (spicy fried rice.) The enclosed black and white picture shows how Sister looked at that time. Joann said her habit was dark gray. The habits of the CBsisters are mostly blue now.

Sister Bonaventura/Marie accompanied by her brother, Father Leonard, visited in the United State sometime in late 1967 or early 1968. This picture of the siblings, gathered in the living room of the house on Guy Jacobs’ farm, is included here.

Near the end of her life, Theo remembered visiting some distant family (the children of Aunt Jane) with Sister Bonaventura but diabetes took its toll on her 86 year old body. When they returned to the motherhouse, from that visit, Sister suffered some kind of gastric bleeding. After
that she was no longer allowed to eat food. In that final visit, Sister gave Theo a rosary that her brother, Father Pete, had made. Theo was reluctant to take it but Sister urged him to keep it, saying she had another one. Her religious commitment to self-sacrifice continued to the very end of her life.

One week later, Theo reported, Sister Bonaventura passed away on December 30, 1997. The family attended her funeral on January 3, 1998. She wanted her service to be a happy one. Sister was buried in the convent cemetery in Rijckholt, a village in the Limburg province of the NL, near the town of Eijsden-Margraten, south of Maastricht.

May she rest in peace--this pious woman, who endured much in her lifetime--personal tragedy, Japanese incarceration and working many hours in the service of mothers giving birth. Sister Bonaventura’s religious name indicates good fortune, but we Jacobs’ are the lucky ones, to have had such a dedicated, holy woman as an ancestor.
TIMELINE OF SISTER BONAVENTURA’S LIFE AND CAREER

Maria Pilagia Jacobs born, Den Bommel, NL ......................................................... April 28, 1911

Attendance in local school .............................................................................................................. 1917-1923?

Maria & Tonni moved to household of Koenraadts ................................................................. 1923

Attendance in boarding school .................................................................................................... 1923-1929

Maria enters the convent of the Sister of Charity of St. Charles Borromeo, Maastricht, NL . 1929

Maria takes final vows as Sister Bonaventura ........................................................................ May 14, 1931

Sister in Nijmegen, NL (education?) ......................................................................................... 1931

Sister in Schiedam, NL (education) ............................................................................................ 1932

Sister begins medical missionary work, Bandung, DEI ......................................................... June 8, 1934

Transfer to Bengkulu, DEI ........................................................................................................... 1936

Transfer to Gandjuran, DEI ....................................................................................................... December 1939

Internment in Jappenkamp ......................................................................................................... March 1942-August 1945

Transfer to Tjitjadas, DEI (Borromeus Hospital?) ................................................................. September 1946

[Indonesian declared independence] ......................................................................................... November 2, 1949

Work and retirement to Motherhouse in Onder de Bogen, Maastricht, NL ........... March 15, 1974

Death ........................................................................................................................................... December 30, 1997

Funeral and burial ....................................................................................................................... January 3, 1998
**BIRTH YEARS AND DATES, PETER JACOBS FAMILY, DEN BOMMEL, NL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Birth Date</th>
<th>Death Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Petrus Gerardus Jacobs</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Born, 1/26/1864</td>
<td>Died, 5/20/1940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johanna Quirina Buijs</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Born, 1/28/1867</td>
<td>Died, 5/14/1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marriage of Peter and Johanna</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>February 23, 1889</td>
<td>(Ooltgensplaat, NL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SURVIVING CHILDREN</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacobs (Jake) Quirinus</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Born, 11/25/1889</td>
<td>Died, 1/28/1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quirinus (Clarence) Johannes</td>
<td>1891</td>
<td>Born, 8/21/1891</td>
<td>Died, 3/14/1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johanna (Jane) Maria</td>
<td>1893</td>
<td>Born, 7/17/1893</td>
<td>Died, 5/11/1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johannes (Hans) Laurentius</td>
<td>1894</td>
<td>Born, 8/12/1894</td>
<td>Died, 2/20/1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornelius (Cor) Adrianus</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>Born, 8/22/1895</td>
<td>Died, 3/20/1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonius (Fr. Anton) Leonardus</td>
<td>1896</td>
<td>Born, 10/2/1896</td>
<td>Died, 8/9/1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martinus (Martin)</td>
<td>1897</td>
<td>Born, 12/30/1897</td>
<td>Died, 8/11/1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonardus (Fr. Leonard) Antonius</td>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Born, 1/3/1899</td>
<td>Died, 8/23/1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrianus (Adrian) Gerardus</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>Born, 3/4/1900</td>
<td>Died, 12/18/1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petrus Jozef (Fr. Pete)</td>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Born, 5/15/1902</td>
<td>Died, 3/7/1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leo (Leo)</td>
<td>1903</td>
<td>Born, 7/9/1903</td>
<td>Died, 4/12/1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johannes (John)</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Born, 1/25/1905</td>
<td>Died, 4/9/1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aegidius (Guy) Antonius</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>Born, 4/12/1906</td>
<td>Died, 5/19/1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerardus (Gerard) Maria</td>
<td>1907</td>
<td>Born, 4/30/1907</td>
<td>Died, 4/5/1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonia (Tonni) Maria</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Born, 6/29/1908</td>
<td>Died, 2/21/1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria (Marie) Pilagia</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Born, 4/28/1911</td>
<td>Died, 12/30/1997</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Known Japanese Internment Camps on DEI for Women, Java & Sumatra, 1942-1945

Bangakalan
Tihapit
Moentilaan (Muntilan?)
Amabarwa
Bandung
Chemahi
Werfstraat prison
De Wijk
Muntok
Palembang
Loebok Linggau
Poentjak Sekoening
Halmahera
Tjideng
Magelang
Tjimahi
Batavia
Makassar

Website to investigate these camps: https://www.indischekamparchieven.nl/
GLOSSARY

Country names, WWII then the present

Malaya=Malaysia
Manchuria=China (part of China)
Formosa=Taiwan
French Indo-China=Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam
Siam=Thailand
Dutch East Indies (DEI)=Indonesia
Batavia=Jakarta (city in DEI)
Burma=Myanmar

Unusual Vocabulary from the WWII time period

Kongai—small coops, camp societies to help fellow prisoners
QARANC—Queen Alexandra’s Royal Army Nursing Corps
Jappenkamp—Dutch for Japanese internment camp
Kempei Tai—Japanese secret police
Hei Hoes—Javanese or native prison guards
Gedek—Korean guards
Susa—threatening behavior by Japanese, meant to humiliate
Tenko—roll call, counting of prisoners
Padang—a central courtyard or open space
Bali-bali—raised platform for sleeping
Totoks—native DEI name for Dutch residents
Webography, in order of usage

cbsisters.net
indischekamparchieven.nl
ww2ab.com/country/dutch_east_indies
https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Windlust_Achthuizen
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goeree-Overflakke
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Netherlands
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www.wikiwand.com/em/Panti_Rapih_Hospital
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Zuster Bonaventura obituary, published from the Sisters of Charity of St. Charles Borromeo, Onder de Bogen, Maastricht, NL, January 3, 1998


Information by e-mail, Theo Jacobs to Pete and Laureen Jacobs, March 21, 2017.


Information by e-mail, Dorothé Knaven-Rasing, April 22, 2017


Something About the Author

Laureen Marie Geppert Jacobs was born in St. Louis, MO on April 20, 1951. She is the daughter of Lawrence and Eileen Geppert and her siblings are two brothers and a sister. Laureen’s childhood was spent in Belleville, IL, Valley Station, KY and Alexandria, VA. She attended Catholic schools until she spent a year in college. In 1970, Laureen married Marine Corps aviator, Peter Jacobs. The couple later welcomed two daughters, Julia and Carolyn, who are now married, with families of their own. The Pete Jacobs family lived in North Carolina twice, Virginia, Hawaii, Rhode Island, Alabama and two locations in California, during Pete’s 27 year military career.

Laureen received a BA in History from The University of Hawaii (1985) and an MLS [Master of Library Science] from The University of California, Los Angeles in 1994. Laureen enjoyed a 20 year career as a Children’s Librarian for the Arlington [Texas] Public Library. She retired in August 2014.

Pete and Laureen have lived in one spot, Arlington, Texas for 22 years. Their extended family includes two sons-in-law and five beautiful grandchildren, who live in Texas and California. Laureen now does some volunteer work and her hobbies include sewing, quilting and reading. She is also somewhat of a fanatic to learn about the Carnegie Libraries of Texas.