

VAM to Van: A-D

Van Bredenoede

October 8, 1948

My dear Mrs. van Brederode:

I used your letter in my column the other day, without your name, of course, because you are typical of many another young housewife who is bewildered by the political and social aspects of the postwar period.

The housewife can really make public opinion and is doing so at the present time. The trouble is that she often makes it too late and instead of foreseeing the troubles that will come and guard against them, she tries to find remedies when they are already upon her.

I think we will come through this period as we have come through other ones but as our war period was longer than ever before, it will take us longer to extricate ourselves.

Very sincerely yours,

Matwah, N. J.  
September 23, 1946

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,

Wishes  
Calm

In my opinion, letters are not a satisfactory means of conveying an idea or a problem. I wish I could talk to you as I would to one of my neighbors, but as that is impossible, I shall try to make myself clear on paper.

I am the mother of two little boys, and expect another baby in March. For over two weeks now we have had no red-blood meat - no sugar for puddings, applesauce etc. and the cost of plain, ordinary foodstuffs is so out of this world that the whole situation is absurd.

The American public has

I am only an ordinary housewife, but I'm sure every woman holds the same opinion I have. Taken collectively, we could be one of the most powerful forces the country ever knew.

Too many of our women's organizations and women in politics are held in ridicule by not only newspapers and magazines, but by the public in general. Does this mean we have no way to get to the root of the problem and honestly try to do something about it?

I hope you don't think I'm some sort of a crank. I'm not. I am just puzzled by America right now.

May I have your opinion on all this? My mailing address is just Mahwah, New Jersey - and my telephone is Cragmere 8-3779. Sincerely  
(Mrs) Mary S. van Briderode

become complacent. We literally sit back and take any and all "orders" issued to us. Maybe we discuss the situation with friends in our own home, but we do nothing. Letters to our Congressmen seem to have lost their value. What can we do?

My question is "what can the housewife do to exert her influence?" You are a mother - if the health of your children was being threatened, what would you do?

As a matter of fact, the entire nation is in danger. Weaken the coming generation and we will be an easy prey for any future aggressor.

*VanderLean*

*W*

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

April 3, 1946

*Recd. 4/3/46*

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

I referred your letter of March 14 and the enclosed excerpts from a Dutch diary to our political officers who are concerned with the Dutch East Indies. I am enclosing a copy of their comments.

I am not sure whether these comments answer all of the questions you had in mind. If not, let me look into this question further.

With my good wishes,

Sincerely yours,

*Wm Benton*

William Benton

Enclosure

Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt  
Hyde Park,  
Dutchess County,  
New York.

*I am so happy  
at last to have  
had the chance  
to meet you. In Anna  
Rosenberg, George Bye & others  
we have many mutual  
friends —*

Comments on excerpts from a diary written in Java, and submitted by Mrs. Th. Van der Laan of Curacao, N.W.I.

From information obtained from the Netherlands Embassy in Washington, it appears that the Netherlands authorities hope eventually to be able to evacuate from the Netherlands East Indies some 70,000 persons. It is understood that as a result of the political disturbances, lack of shipping and the inability of the British and Dutch authorities concerned to provide other temporary housing facilities, it has been necessary for about 35,000 persons to remain internment camps while awaiting evacuation.

No official Red Cross reports are yet available concerning conditions in the internee camps, although early press reports indicated that conditions were deplorable. More recent press reports would seem to indicate that the conditions described in Mr. Van der Laan's diary have considerably improved in the last two months. The Chicago Tribune of February 18, 1946 carried an article by Harold Smith from Batavia which stated that information obtained from two Swiss representatives of the International Red Cross, who had just returned from a two weeks' tour of 50 camps in unoccupied Java, indicated that there was little evidence of malnutrition and no evidence of deliberate mistreatment but that there was a critical shortage of medical supplies. The Swiss representatives reportedly found conditions in the camps in Java to have been better than those they had previously visited in Germany, Egypt, and the Sudan.

bring them out of danger.

December 29th 1945.

W-11. Extracts from the diary of a Dutch officer in Java.

To Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt  
Val-Kill Cottages  
Hyde Park, Dutchess County  
New - York.

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt :

Ever since your one day stay in our small island of the Caribbean in March 1944 I have felt the inspiration of your visit. - I had the honour to sit opposite you during the lunch at Government House that day and greatly admired your broadmindedness, warmth of speech and insight.

My husband was the Attorney-General here and also your guide to the American Forces stationed on this island. Three days after your visit he left for the Far East ; at first he was attached to the Dutch section at British Headquarters in Ceylon, and in the beginning of this year he joined our troops in New-Guinea and did legal work in all liberated areas in the Molucca's, Celebes and Borneo.

October 4th he landed near Batavia as a member of the Dutch Civil Affairs Organization and has since sent me , pretty regular accounts of "his day". In the beginning he was rather hopeful of the restoration of order overthere, but in his last letters he only speaks of the shortage of British and Dutch men and material, even for protection of the ex-internees and ex-prisoners-of-war from the hatred of youthful bandits, pupils of the Japanese Co-Prosperity-school, and of a shortage of ships and planes to bring them out of danger.

December 6th 1945

October 4th 1945

Extracts from the Press

Here I am again at the airport, looking at the faces of the people who are leaving for the East Indies. I am looking at the faces of the people who are leaving for the East Indies. I am looking at the faces of the people who are leaving for the East Indies.

His very last letter, dated December 6th, conveyed the sad news of the murdering in the night in Bandung of my brother-in-law and the hospitalization of my sister and her thirteen year-old son with shotwounds. My other sister who is still interned in a camp with her husband and three small children, living in the same town, cannot reach her because of streetfighting.

It is therefore that I took the liberty of making an extract from some of his letters and, knowing the true friendship you and your great husband have always shown towards our nation, I beg you to consider my plea in giving publicity to any part of this extract whichever you may think helpful in this cause, hoping that it may bring quick help and relief before our people over there are murdered or lost.

I know that the public is rather tired of atrocity-stories, but I know too that it will listen to the story of a Dutch lawyer: who has witnessed these things with his own eyes... if you introduce him!

With best wishes and the deepest feeling of gratitude for all you and your country have already done for the restoration of peace and justice in this unhappy world, and particularly for my country,

I remain, dear Madam, yours sincerely,

Anna B. van der Haas -  
Schepers

P.S. I spoke about this letter to Mrs. Lynn Franklin, the wife of your Consul in Surabaja and she advised me to send it to you.

Good.

Extracts from the Diary of a Dutch officer in Java.

October 4th 1945. Here I am back in Batavia, Java, after an absence of seven years! What a change have I noticed already on my way from the airport to NIOA (Netherlands Indies Civil Affairs) Headquarters : all of the formerly neatly whitewashed houses looked gray and dirty, the gardens were overgrown with weeds and grasses, the streets full of holes and the filth of years! On the streets we met several trucks laden with Indonesians, crying "Merdeka" (the Malayan word for Freedom). The tramwagons were painted with slogans to the same effect : "We don't ask for freedom, we have a right to freedom", "We don't want NIOA", "Van Mook what are you doing here?" - not such a nice welcome for us ! And we met several big, beautifully gleaming cars.... with Japanese officers who saluted and bowed correctly without any attempt to conceal their triumphant smiles !

In Headquarters we had one bathroom for 150 men and for our food we had to walk 10 minutes to an Army-kitchen where we got after waiting in a row some rice with a kind of vegetable sauce over it.

Here I found the first Internees-camp, where our fellow-country men still live just as they did under the Japs, because outside the camps there is no safety for them - only the food has improved a little, thanks to the Red Cross. It was in one word HORRIBLE ; all was filthy, dirty, decrepit; barbed wire all around, no beds, only mattresses, but not even one for each person, mosquitoes in millions and no nets ! Most of the internees walked miserably and nearly senseless around, unaware of their surroundings; a few of them, though physically as badly off as the others, recognized me ; one could only whisper ; another was nearly blind, all because of vitamin-shortage - an awful reunion !

October 6th. To-day I visited Camp Tjideng which is the worst I have seen so far. It consists of several very small houses in which are squeezed as many women and children as could go into it : in one small house of five rooms of about 25 M2. surface each, I counted 86 women, lying on their mattresses on the bare floor with their children crawling over them leaving not an inch of walking space. Not a single chair or table; they had to do their cooking in the heat of the sun outside, on wood or charcoal. Thus 10.000 European and American women and children have lived for more than three years under the Japs who wanted to starve all of them and diminished the food everyday until they got absolutely nothing but one heaped dessertspoon-ful of dry rice for the whole day ! They told me that they ate frogs, snails, serpents and caterpillars and liked them ! The worst cases of starvation had already been taken to the hospitals, but what I saw was a challenge to heaven ! The women look old and tired with gray hair and hollow eyes, they are clothed in a few rags; the children are all bones : arms and legs thin as twigs, and they have become as some sort of savages, growing wild without any schools. The putrefaction is incredible : the Jap has shut off the waterpipes and destroyed the sewage-system. The women had to carry their excrements to holes, belonging to the old sewage-system, and if these got clogged they or their children were forced to go down into it to open them up again. They had to carry the water from wells in buckets that were too heavy for their diminishing strength. Never in my life have I seen as many flies and at night they have myriads of mosquitos.

I met some of our old friends there who had come over from Bandung during the time the Japs surrendered and there was great confusion; they tried now to help their wives, who are at the end of their resistance, with the heavy manual labour. No one knows why the Japs are not used for this job. These men have been in the camps up in the mountains where it is cooler and are therefore a little better off than their wives; their boys of over thirteen years of age were put in separate boys-camps. Whenever I visit a camp I have my pockets full of soap, tooth-paste, toothbrushes, cigarettes, etc. You cannot imagine the elation they show when they receive these presents. And the only thing to do next is to listen to their tales - which at last they can tell - and to keep silent over so much misery. For hours at a stretch they had to stand attention in the sun with the children, some of the women's heads were shaven bald, some days the Japs put down the food in the middle of the camp, forbidding them to touch it unless they were naked. When they asked for firewood they brought in the camp whole tree trunks without any tools to work with.

November 4th. To-day I have been here a whole month and when I look back over this month I feel a great disappointment over the situation. Instead of improvement living conditions are getting worse by the day. The internees are still living in their miserable camps, the food is diminishing, because the Indonesians prevent their good-willing fellow-countrymen from selling anything to white people, thousands of families still live separated, no work can be done because of the complete anarchy and every day some of us are murdered in plain daylight. Those internees that are fittest have tried to do some office-work, but after 1 or 2 hours they had to give up and every day they achieve less. The food for all of us consists of a porridge of starch in the morning and two times rice with a watery soup, at noon and in the evening. Our only beverage is water: no coffee or cacao or tea is available in this country where these foodstuffs grow!! The Red Cross workers are unable to help, because they are the aim of the hatred of the population wherever they show themselves.

And the future looks worse still, for the Japs have destroyed our carefully organized former distribution-system by creating all over Java a system of closed areas that had to be self-supporting, causing a rice-shortage in some and a rice-abundance in other parts of the country. But because the Jap took away the surplus, the Javanese in the rich areas planted less and less every year and now production is insufficient. If we had been able to put in the distribution-system that the Government planned in Brisbane, present provisions might have lasted until next harvest - as it is now famine is inevitable.

November 16th. It was officially announced to-day that since the first of October 116 persons have been declared missing, the real figure will undoubtedly be much higher still. Nobody has the faintest idea of what happened to them, but it is pretty certain that all of them have been murdered. Even women are kidnapped, and Red Cross workers. The extremists fire on us from passing cars, from trees and even throw sharp knives into passing cars behind hedges! We are not allowed to go out into the streets unless at least two or three are together and with our weapons ready for use, and we stay in our quarters after 6.30 p.m.

Sukarno has occupied all vital public utilities : the water-works, the electricity-company, post-office, telephone-and broadcast-installations and all governmental buildings - and they function pretty badly ; the light is weak and many days we have no water at all. The Indonesian newspapers incite to murder every European, the Indonesian broadcast spits heaps of dirt over British and Dutch alike and what they have done to prisoners-of-war and internees is worse than the Japs have ever done! Hundreds of women and children have been murdered in Surabaya with bayonets, kidnapped men are cut into pieces alive and the chopped-off limbs are thrown away in all directions, men have to walk between two rows of Indonesians, armed with sticks, clubs, spears and knives until they die. The food in the camps is - according to a report of Prof. van Veen, Head of the Medical Section of RAPWI ("Rehabilitation of Allied Prisoners-of-War and Internees" - already carrying the nickname of "Retaining All Prisoners-of-war Indefinitely"!)-worse than it has ever been under the Japs - and we get, as is reasonable, less than they get!

November 19th. Yesterday I happened to drive in a car into the middle of a street battle; luckily the driver drove on at full speed and so we arrived safely in our lines, where we could not proceed further and had to witness the fighting from behind a tree - after a while the street was full of wounded and dead. In the streets you see no people anymore, the shops are empty, it seems that Indonesians flee from Batavia, the police does not dare to intervene out of fear of their country-men and it is just the same with the servants : they are threatened if they cooperate with us which all of the older Javanese are only too willing to do, because they still are the soft, peace-and-order loving creatures you have known during the 10 happy years we lived together in these regions. It makes me sad to see how a few thousand young rascals of about 16 or 18 years of age, taught and armed by the Japanese are able to transform our beloved, beautiful island into a Hell of murder and death. Under the pretext of reinforcement of the police they smuggle more of these boys into Batavia every day. In a Japanese truck that brought food to the Vincentius-hospital were found underneath the foodstuffs 4 machine-guns and 2 boxes filled with handgranades !!

Luckily the British have declared : "The gloves are off" and "The whole world must know how these uncivilised barbarians slaughter innocent women and children" which statements have succeeded to give back a little hope to the ex-internees who have endured the maltreatment of the Japs admirably but cannot stand very much more of this misery.

December 2nd. To-day I got the following letter from your youngest sister in Bandung about the dreadful affliction of your other sister :

"Dear T., I don't know if you already heard of it, but there happened such an awful thing : this night our sister and brother-in-law were attacked in the house of the friends they lived with since their liberation from camps 2 months ago and our brother-in-law is murdered. Our sister has been taken to a Hospital with a shot through her right elbow, her thirteen year-old son is with her with glasswounds - her ten year-old daughter and three year-old son are unhurt. Is not this one great horror ? We have no words anymore. It is becoming a formal war here, with bombs, mortarshots, machine-guns, etc. and often very near our camp. Yesterday we saw a huge fire in the direction of the place they lived and at that moment it happened. Absolutely unreal does it sound when you write it down ! I don't know anything else.

"A friend told it to me who had heard it from somebody in the town and because I could not believe it I rang up the Hospital and there the little wounded boy came to the phone : "Daddy is dead!" he said and I could speak no more because of the horror of a time in which a child of 13 years has to say a thing like this through the telephone in this unnatural way. - And it seems that the Hospital is also surrounded and will have to be evacuated, that is to say : the healthy women and children who have found refuge there from their burnt-down houses in the neighbourhood must leave. We have already informed the Hospital that the 3 children must come to us at once, although the danger for this camp is not much less. - Oh dear, this is no time to live in, please do be careful ! There are optimistic rumours in our camp over real improvement in the attitude of the Allies towards us - Will they realize now at last that this is not Sumatra but a serious, heavy and cruel war ??

Just in time I have joined my husband here - I am happy that at least we live together through this hell. From the letters I receive from Batavia I get the impression that life is still the same over there as it is here : a real Wild West. I don't leave the camp anymore. I wish I could go to the Hospital, but it is impossible although it is only a quarter-of-an-hour's drive from here. I don't know how he died : perished in the flames or killed by knives or shot ? And I even don't know if he has been buried. As soon as I know more I shall write you again.

We would be delighted if you could come here, there will be room for you at any moment, but I would not advise you to come, it is a complete witch's den here and deadly dangerous. And anyhow there is only a mailservice between our two towns. The only help we get in our need is .... from the Japs !! Who could have dreamt of this a year ago in the times they maltreated and starved us ! I have constant imaginations of a yelling, assaulting troop/carrying red-white flags falling down over us and that is what happened to them ! And then to think that our brother-in-law was one of their best advocates as long as their demands were decently proposed - this is the sad irony of Fate ! Let's hope that he died quickly . Yours truly E. "

*/Of Indonesians*

I do not think that I have to add anything to this letter, but the bitter statement that it is thus that thousands of Dutch citizens still live in deadly danger nearly four months after the Japs surrendered without any hope of liberation from their plight!!