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Me idagen

(Days of May)



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A Dutch soldier experiences the first days of World War II on the Zeeland Flanders coast. As the rest of the country is quickly getting invaded and his battalion can only wait helplessly for the enemy to arrive, his faith will be put to a test.

Writer & Director

Juri Ferri

Producers

Thomas Mataheru

Jolijn van Rinsum

Genre

Historical / War / Drama

Length

15 to 20 minutes

Shooting Dates

April 2019

Synopsis

It's 10th May 1940, and the soldiers of the 2nd battalion of the 40th infantry regiment have started to arm the battle stations. The Wehrmacht is marching on Dutch soil and the Luftwaffe is bombing strategic targets. Yet, they are stationed on the coast of the Zeeland Flanders, far away from where the fighting is taking place. Ordonnans **Jan Simons**, riding his bicycle up and down the dunes, enters a new routine as he brings the officers' orders to the rest of the troops and performs menial tasks while the war is raging elsewhere in the country.

As the days pass and the situation develops, soldiers open up in conversations that might not have happened as easily before. Talks about purpose in the universe, free will, and God become more common. Jan is very outspoken about his faith: a convinced Christian, he believes that God is in control of everything and has an everlasting plan.

Days pass and the tension ramps up. The advance of the Wehrmacht is unstoppable. Most officers leave. Rumour is that the Germans will be arriving soon. As the nearby town of Middelburg is bombed, and the fire is visible from the distance, Jan fears for his life for the first time. He decides to desert his post and go into hiding. But will he be able to live up to his own convictions?

Themes

War, faith, comradeship, making decisions in difficult times, remaining true to oneself.

Character descriptions

Jan Simons (33) was drafted in the army when the country mobilized in August 1939. He performs the tasks of a “fiets-ordonnans”, riding a bicycle and communicating orders from the officers to the battle stations. He is known by his comrades for having a calm and reflective spirit, and for being able to keep his composure even in times of pressure. He is a convinced Christian who believes that God is in control and that he has an everlasting plan for mankind, and he has always been happy to profess his faith to his unbelieving comrades. Nevertheless, the fast progress of the Wehrmacht causes him to fear for his life and doubt his own convictions for the first time.

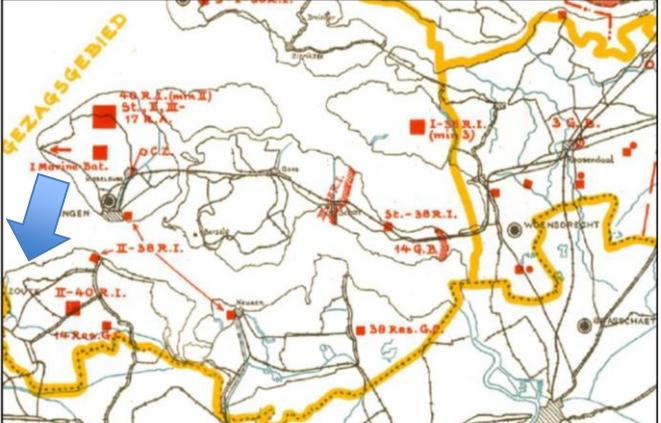
De Ruiter (30) is in many ways the polar opposite of Jan. Short, hot-headed and cynical, he has often got himself into trouble. Nevertheless, even though at first the two would not get along, he has become Jan's closest friend in Cadzand. He sees himself as a bit of a philosopher: his skeptic and materialistic convictions are at odds with Jan's Christian beliefs. This has often generated fervent debates in the camp.

Terpstra (29) and **Hellendoorn (25)** are soldiers that belong to Jan's section. Terpstra is a practical man who always strives for efficiency. Hellendoorn is one of the youngest men in the group. They both have built close relations in the ten months they have spent in the army, in which there has been place for banter as well as comradeship and mutual respect.

Luitenant Derksen (50s) is a military officer. Jan responds directly to his commands and aids him to his officer duties. While always trying to appear stern and unforgiving, he is actually a kind man who can be quite charismatic with his troops. He has a soft spot towards Jan but he intends to hide it as much as possible.

Buyze (50s) is a middle-aged farmer. He has worked all of his life in his farm, yet his status is quite high, owning land and employing several farmhands. He is a local to the Zeeland Flanders, as all of his family for generations before him. His farm, his land and his animals are the most important thing in the world for him.

Izaak de Boone (40s) owns and runs a café near the beach, together with his wife. Once an establishment catered towards tourists (come to enjoy the beach and mild weather of Zeeland), his pub has been mostly providing support for the troops stationed in the area. He has become friends with many of the soldiers who visit the pub regularly, and to some of them, a confidant. A local of Cadzand, he has many connections in the area and is related to Buyze.



Abbeelding: positie van de Nederlandse troepen in Zeeland en Zeeuws-Vlaanderen



Source Material

This story is based on the real life of Jan Hendrik Smit, who chronicled his experience in the Dutch army during those crucial weeks in May 1940 in a literary memoir with the title *Belevenissen tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (“Experiences during the Second World War”). The film is based on the first few chapters of the book, from the beginning of the war on 10th May to the moment in which the Dutch troops are forced to leave Zeeland just about 10 days later. This is only the beginning of a longer story, which continues with a long march to Brugge and then Oostende, witnesses increasingly destructive war actions until the capitulation of Belgium, and culminates with Jan’s return to his home in Utrecht.

This book, written a few years after the end of the war, was never published, but only circulated within the Smit family. It is narrated in third person and with fictitious names, which gives it a literary quality. It is a document that gives us a unique insight into the heart and mind of a simple person that found himself through an event that changed history. It is a clear testament of his faith in God and how that kept him going in rough times, giving us a unique example of how someone can make sense of war that left a mark on an entire generation. Most importantly, it gives us a first-hand perspective of how things were happening at the time, making our story ring a lot truer than any fictional account.



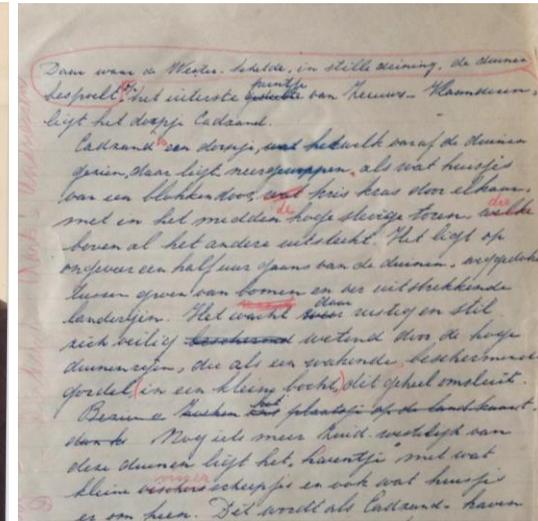
Jan Hendrik Smit in the Army in 1940



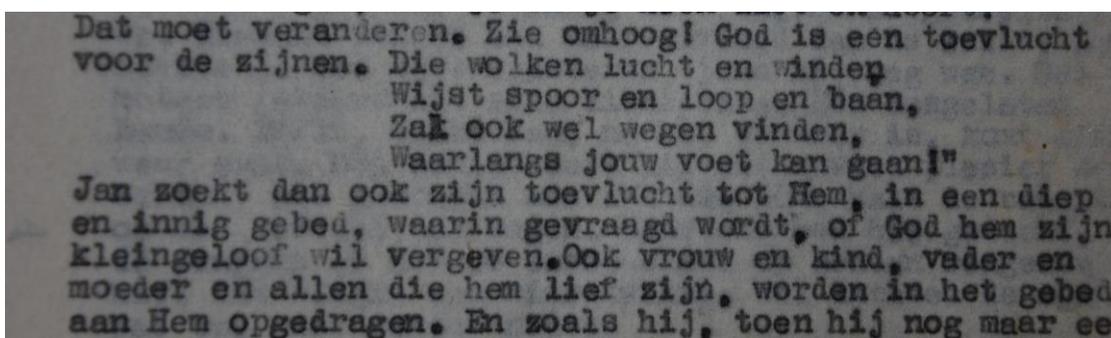
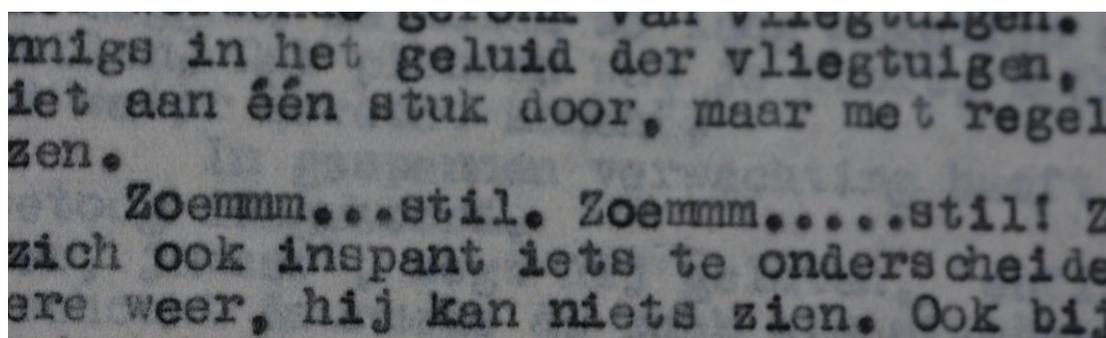
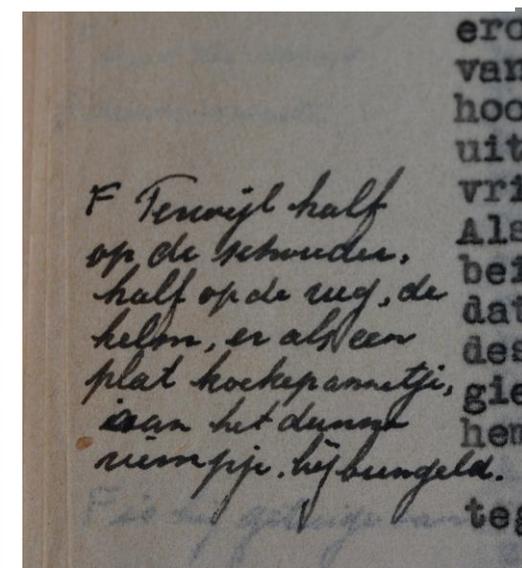
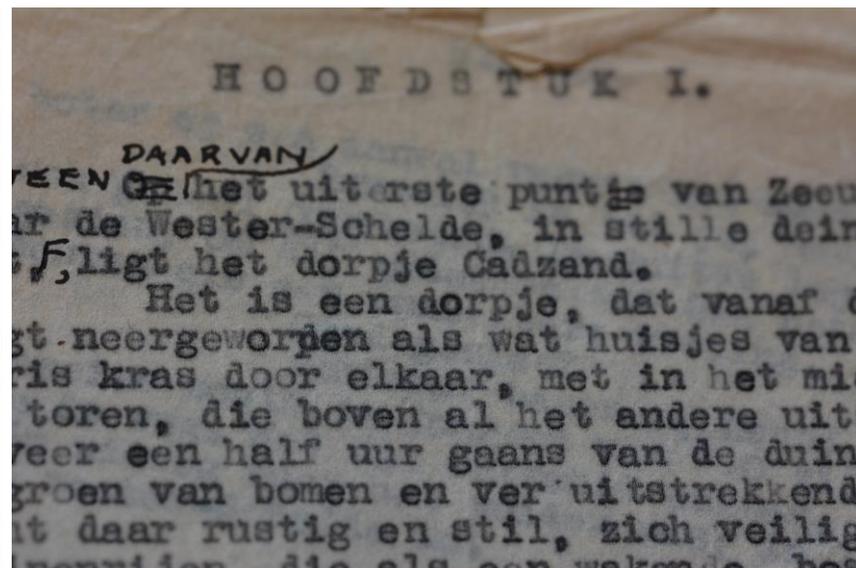
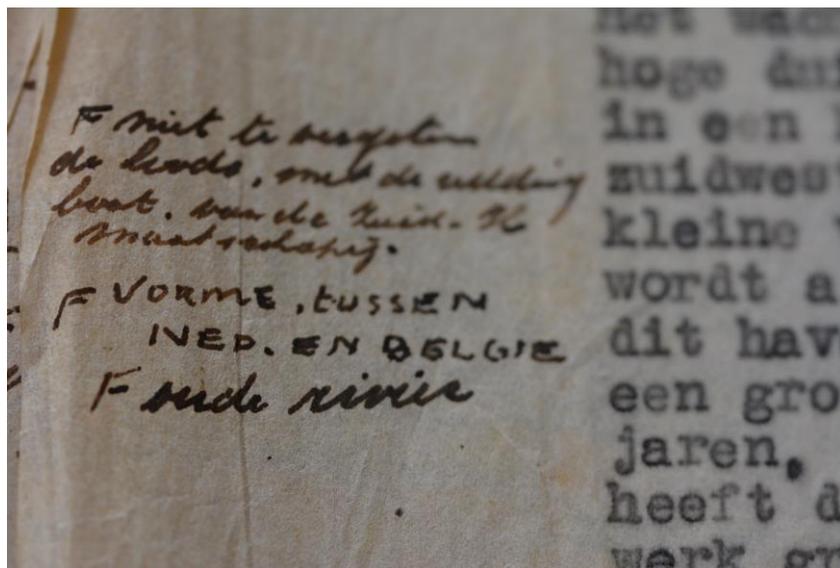
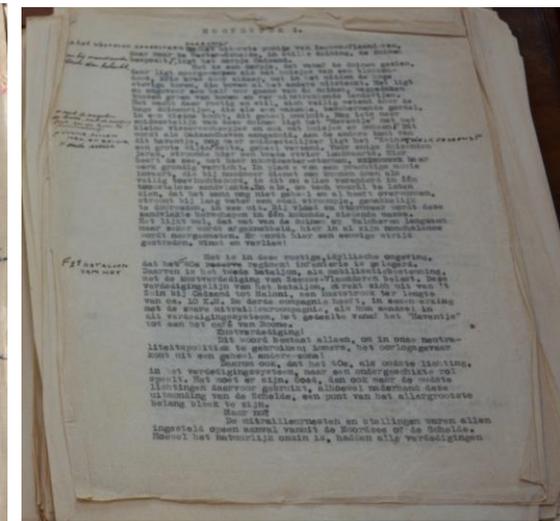
JHS in his elder years



The original handwritten manuscript



The typewritten version



Details from the manuscript, with corrections made by JHS' own hand

Visual-Style

The world of the film is a world that needs to feel very real and concrete. We would like to achieve a timeless feel, and not make it look like a modern film. That's why we have chosen to shoot on 16mm film. This format, with its grain and grit, is ideal to depict the world of WW2 in a plain, unglamorous way, and the added texture of celluloid will give it an organic and naturalistic feel. It will also give this film a unique look in this increasingly digital age.

In general, we are aiming for something that looks it could have been made in a different era, to help the audience feel like they are back in 1940. We are inspired by colour photographs from the time, which have a washed out and gritty look yet feel a lot more real than the black and white pictures we are used to see. The look of the film will be firmly grounded in the time and place in which the story takes place. Particular attention will be given to the organic colours and feel of Zeeland (the sky, the dunes, the sea) and how they blend and contrast with mechanics of warfare (uniforms, weapons, machinery).



The Hurt Locker (reg. Kathryn Bigelow, 2008), geschoten op 16mm film



Oorlog in een kustlandschap in *Dunkirk* (reg. Christopher Nolan, 2017)

Director's Statement

This story is deeply personal to me because it is the story of my great-grandfather. Even though he died before I was born, I got to know him through his writing and vivid description of his wartime experience. Since I lived in Zeeland for almost four years (quite the coincidence!), I also feel a connection with the location in which it all takes place, and I would like to represent the unique character of a Province that often stands forgotten.

World War 2 stories are popular in the Netherlands, yet the days of May 1940 are less often portrayed in WW2 narratives. I am interested in exploring what must have been going on in the mind of a simple soldier during those days, how he experienced them in his everyday life, and ultimately, how he managed to make sense of this event much bigger than any single person. The story focuses on how hard it is to act and live by our beliefs, especially as tension ramps up and defeat (with all its great unknowns) is around the corner. Ultimately, nevertheless, this story shows how Jan's faith is reaffirmed after a moment of doubt: his faith in God's Providence becomes his strength, and it allows him to get through this war with a sense of purpose and confidence.

Rather than focusing on the immediate, external conflict (in fact, German soldiers never appear in the story), this film focuses on the interior struggle of a single man, on the doubts and big questions that are part of human experience in every time and in every place. It portrays only an incident in a much larger canvas that affected men and women all over the country and the world.



Rare colour photographs from the Second World War in the Netherlands



The colours and landscape of Zeeland

State of affairs

The script has been completed and it's ready to move into pre-production. We are aiming to shoot in mid-April 2019 so that we can have a reasonable chance of good weather and longer daytime hours, which will hopefully help us approximate the atmospheric conditions of May.

Key heads of department such as Director of Photography and Production Designer are already on board. Some crew members will be London Film School students, flying in for the occasion, while others will be Netherlands-based, including hopefully some local crew from Zeeland.

We will be casting in the Netherlands during the first few months of 2019. We are looking into the option to cast some small roles in Zeeland, next to extras.

A good part of the funding has already been secured from private investors, next to an equity investment from the London Film School. We are currently still looking for investors and planning to run a crowdfunding campaign in early 2019 to cover for the gap between equity investments and total budget.

Crew

Juri Ferri is an Italian filmmaker based in London. Born and raised near Bergamo, Italy, he lived four years in Middelburg, the Netherlands, where he pursued an undergraduate degree at University College Roosevelt. He has a deep connection with the Netherlands also thanks to his family roots, and he speaks Dutch fluently. From 2016, he lives in London and studies at the London Film School. There he worked on several different films, and directed, among others, *UB-13* a black and white short film set in a German WWI submarine. *MEIDAGEN* is based on his great-grandfather's war experiences and will be his LFS graduation film.



Blanc Film is a production house founded by **Thomas Mataheru** and **Jolijn van Rinsum**. Thomas and Jolijn started Blanc Film during their studies at the Netherlands Film Academy. They had both always had the dream to start their own company, but they had not found the right partner yet. During the production of their joint graduation film *SISTERS* (2018, dir. Daphne Lucker) they clicked together. They complete each other very well and share the same ambitions. Blanc Film is a production company that wants to make films telling personal stories that make an impact in an outspoken way. Brutal individuality with challenging extremes.