

The Underground Adventures of  
**Johannes Moerman (1922-1998)**  
*(as told by Gerhard Van Leeuwen in September 2009)*

*To the general population, the underground activities of Johannes Moerman were invisible. But to those on the inside, those with knowledge like the Moermans and the Van Leeuwens, his activities were clearly visible.*

### **Five Pigs, One Scarf**

The Van Leeuwen Family Farm (Huis Ten Dorp) had the pigbarn attached to the house – a common practice in those days. They had five fat pigs ready for market – well-fed, beautiful looking pigs – but were concerned that thieves from the city would come and take those pigs for themselves or for profit. In fact, the Van Leeuwen's were so concerned that every night, they secured the door with a piece of wire tied to the door of the barn and connected it to a milk can filled with stones. That way, if there was an intruder in the night, it would make a noise and the men could take whatever action was necessary. But one fine morning, everyone woke up and went to the barn – only to find that the wire was cut, the door was standing open, and the pigs were gone! What happened was that Opa Van Leeuwen was convinced that the Germans would be coming to take the pigs to feed their own soldiers. Rather than risking that, he “encouraged” his future son-in-law Johannes Moerman, to come and “steal” the pigs and give them to the poor. So Dad knew in advance about the security tactic. Only a scarf was located that morning, lying on the ground, giving evidence to the silent perpetrator who had dropped it. Everyone knew who the scarf belonged to ... Johannes Moerman.



night before the cement was going to be poured, a certain someone crept in the darkness, located the bags of cement and quietly slid them into the canal. The Germans were furious and claimed that unless they found who did this, they would begin burning down houses. Fortunately, the perpetrator was never found, nor was the threat carried out.

### **A Courageous Move and a Cowardly Blackmail**

A man in Delft came under suspicion of the Nazis and had to flee for his life and go “underground”. He needed to not only clear out his entire house, including possessions, but his wife and small children as well. The Nazis were coming for him. Under the cover of darkness, Johannes Moerman and Piet Van Leeuwen (who lived next to Huis Ten Dorp) arrived with a horse, a wagon and a pistol. This was incredibly dangerous operation, because breaking the night curfew could lead to being shot on sight. Breaking the curfew was not uncommon when you were on foot, or on a bicycle, but to break the curfew with a horse and wagon when there was nowhere to hide, was tantamount to suicide ... or the height of selfless courage and bravery. The moving crew arrived at night, loaded the wagon, and made it to safety.

However, the mission was compromised as someone in Delft found out about the illegal move. This person went to Piet Van Leeuwen and said, “I know what you did. And I’m going to the Nazis with the information unless you provide me with food to eat.” Piet agreed, but soon the demands escalated demands. Piet stated that the demands were no longer sustainable and that lives were at risk. At that point, one of those in the secret care of the Dutch Underground said, “Leave it with me. I’ll deal with it.” He silently made his way into Delft, and “dealt” with the issue. The blackmailer was never heard from again.

On another occasion, a lone Nazi soldier unexpectedly arrived at Piet Van Leeuwen’s place – and saw too much. There were people from the

### **Nazi Construction Interrupted**

Johannes Moerman had a reputation of being willing to try things that no one else would dare to try – and was successful. Near the Schipluiden cemetery, the Nazis were building a barricade on the main street of the town to control the traffic and pedestrians. The three day project began with a number of deep holes into which the Nazis were going to set iron rods surrounded by cement. The

underground, those in hiding now in plain view. The soldier immediately turned his bike around to bring this news to his commanders. However, he was overtaken by the underground and went “missing in action.”

### **Oom Case Vanleeuwen Rides the Rails**

In perhaps 1943, Oom Case Van Leeuwen was taken by the Nazis to work as a laborer in a war factory in Germany. As such, it was a priority target of the Allied Armies and it was bombed not once, not twice, but three times. Many died, but Oom Case narrowly escaped with his life each time. He concluded that it would be safer to escape and risk a trip back to Schipluiden than to stay and wait for the next bombing raid. So he escaped, found a train bound for Amsterdam and laid underneath a pallet of freight in an unheated boxcar. It took 24 hours to get to Amsterdam and he arrived absolutely frozen, delirious and shell-shocked. It was March 1944. When he arrived home at Huis Ten Dorp, Opa Van Leeuwen advised him to immediately enter the underground. Case replied, “Don’t worry, Dad. There are so many dead at that factory, and they don’t keep good records. They’ll just think that I’ve died too.”

### **Crippled Plows**

In 1944, the German retaliation against underground activity was so severe that dad slowed down his subversive operations. But by March 1945, the handwriting was on the wall that the Germans were about to lose, so Dad ramped up his activities again. In preparation for the Allied arrival, the Nazis recruited a group of 8 farmers, with horses and plows, to plow a strategic piece of land so the Germans could flood it – creating a mud soup for the Allied ground forces. Dad was part of this crew and took charge of the 8 farmers. He secretly instructed them, “Bring your oldest and weakest harnesses with you, and make sure that it breaks.” When it did break, dad instructed the farmer to stop in his tracks and got angry at the farmers behind the stalled team who ambitiously veered around the malfunctioning team!

After a day of plowing, around 4:30 pm, the Nazis told everyone to go home. So they unhitched their horses, but left their plows standing all over the field. During the night, Johannes Moerman came back and removed the small wheels off of each plow, rendering them useless.

### **Hello! A VE Delivery – Right in the Package!**

VE Day took place on May 5, 1945 when the Allied Forces liberated Holland from the Nazis. But in small towns such as Schipluiden, there were individual Nazis essentially abandoned by their leaders. So for several days, some of the creative ones donned farmer’s clothing and milled around the town, pretending to be locals. Dad stationed himself at a strategic bridge crossing and asked for each person’s ID. When one suspected Nazi was asked for his ID, he produced a revolver instead. It is said that Dad anticipated that move, and knelt the man ... right in the package. Ouch. The Nazi was promptly hauled off to a compound where the Allies took him as a POW. This cleaning-up phase lasted about four days.

### **Opa Van Leeuwen Insists “But there is No Car HERE!”**

Near the end of the war, the Nazis delivered a brand new car to be used by their officers. It was delivered to the Van Leeuwen farm (Huis Ten Dorp) for pick-up by the officers the following day. They didn’t count on some of the technically inclined underground who spent the night removing the motor and then hiding the car underneath a haystack! When interrogated the next morning, everyone insisted that no car had ever been delivered to the farm. Opa Van Leeuwen was a very honest man, and could not tell a lie. So when he was pressed, he pounded the ground with his cane and stated, quite truthfully, “There is no car here!” meaning at the point where his cane struck the ground. When the war was over, the motor was re-installed and the car used for delivering the mail.

### **Epilogue: Local Farmboy Makes Good**

When Dad returned to Holland in 1973 for their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and preached in Schipluiden, he was all the rage and could’ve ran for mayor – the farmboy who made good with a high stature job as a Minister of the Word.