

### Handout Group # 3 - The Victims

Even though the Dutch tried in many ways to resist, sadly during the Occupation 234,000 Dutch citizens lost their lives. They died in concentration camps as victims of the holocaust, in captivity, by execution, from starvation and hunger, and sickness, disease and general decline in national health as a result of the war conditions.



#### *Victims of the Holocaust*

In 1940 there were 86,000 Jews in Amsterdam. By 1945 there were only 10,000 Jews.

Anne Frank was a young Jewish girl who suffered and died. In 1942, 13 year old Anne and her family went into hiding and did not leave for more than two years. In August, 1944, her family was tracked down, arrested and taken to the Auschwitz concentration camps where the mass slaughter of Jews, Poles, Gypsies and other groups was carried out. Anne's mother died there. Anne and her sister Margot died from typhus. Anne was 15 years old.

In Holland, the trip to the Auschwitz Concentration Camp began at the camp of Westerbork. Westerbork was not an extermination camp. None of its prisoners endured exhausting labour, suffered starvation or had to fear gas chambers. On the contrary, food was reasonable, work endurable and plenty of opportunities for education and recreation. But despite the hope that the prisoners cherished while at Westerbork, it remained a deportation machine for destinations unknown to its passengers. It marked the beginning of the end for those who unfortunately found themselves here. Between July 1942 and September 1944 it was the gateway to death for more than 100,000 people.

Every Monday night, Westerbork prisoners were faced with the fear of hearing their names or the names of their loved ones called out as the passengers on tomorrow's train. Families were shattered. Husbands and wives divided. Babies torn from their mothers' arms. The elderly and sick separated from those who cared for them. There was no rhyme nor reason to how the names were selected, and there was no way to change the outcome. A Westerbork survivor would later explain...."When the head of the barracks had called out the last names...the camp was in turmoil. Everyone was preparing himself for the coming departure in his own way. Some were stoically packing their things, while others were crying because their child...would have to stay behind all by itself".

#### *Victims of Punishment*

The Dutch rallied to protest not only foreign occupation, but also the systematic persecution of the Jews. Sadly, those who resisted by spying, hiding Jews, publishing underground newspapers or helping to smuggle allied airmen out of the country were arrested, tortured and sent to concentration camps. Civilians were shot in the street by the hundreds. Some 120,000 Dutch men were sent as slave labour to Germany, and 130,000 Jews were assaulted, murdered or

deported to death camps in Poland.

### ***Hunger Winter***

By the winter of 1944-45, the Germans had stripped the country of food and confiscated warm clothing and blankets for their own troops on the eastern front. There was no electricity, no fuel, no gas, no coal or any other fuel for woodstoves and very little food. Rations were minimal. A loaf of bread was worth a fortune on the black market. Urban families, approximately three million people, were forced to scrounge through garbage. Some pulverized vegetable roots or boiled leaves and flower bulbs for sustenance. For warmth, the Dutch destroyed homes (in particular, the Jews empty flats) in order to find wood for their woodstoves - doors, cupboards, kitchens, floors, rafters and roof trusses.

To make matters worse, it was not a mild winter. The canals froze over and became impassable for barges. Food stocks rapidly ran out. Over this winter, known as Hunger winter, a number of factors combined to cause starvation of the Dutch people: the winter itself was unusually harsh and the retreating German army destroyed docks and bridges to flood the country and impede the Allied advance. As the Netherlands became one of the main western battlefields, the widespread dislocation and destruction of the war ruined much of its agricultural land and made the transport of existing food stocks difficult.

Some 230,000 Dutch (106,000 were Jews) civilians died during the war, 18,000 succumbing to starvation in the last winter alone.

### ***Of Interest***

The transports stopped in September 1944. Nothing remains of the Westerbork camp today, but there is a very poignant monument at the site consisting of a piece of railroad track, which at its end is twisted and points into the sky.