

# Youth Remember the Liberation of the Netherlands

## "The Little Coat – A Handmade Gift of Love"

Once upon a time, in 1941, in the small town of Olds, Alberta, a 15-year-old teenager named Bob Elliott had made his decision. He would lie about his age, join the Canadian Army and follow his pals into the Second World War. By 1944, Bob was serving in Holland.

The Netherlands (also known as Holland) had been under German occupation for four years—ever since 1940 when German troops invaded the country. The young soldier was shocked by the violence of war and the suffering of the people who lived there—the Dutch citizens.



Sussie's coat.  
Photo: CWM 20060093-001 © Canadian War Museum

One of the Dutch suffering was 10-year-old Sussie Cretier. Her family, like most of the population, lived in poor conditions: hunger and cold were the staples of a seemingly never-ending war. Plus her family lived in danger. Sussie's father, Willem, was a mechanic involved in the Dutch Resistance. This meant he was against the Germans, and so he passed information to the Allies (which included Canada, Britain, France and the United States), and he hid Jewish people in his house to protect them from the Germans. These acts were considered as crimes by the Germans and unfortunately, the Germans discovered his activities. Sussie and her brothers didn't understand their father's role in the war, but they were old enough to recognize the fear on their mother's face as they watched the Germans hunt for their father. They knew they had to run away or they risked being arrested. The family luckily escaped safely behind the Allied lines in the town of Alphen, with only the clothes on their backs.

The family befriended many of the soldiers stationed there, including young Bob Elliott. Sussie really bonded with the Canadian soldiers who had come to liberate her country. She was always singing and laughing, which was a remedy to the difficult reality they faced. The Canadians often gave Sussie chocolate and chewing gum to take home to her family.

For Christmas, the soldiers made a special gift for Sussie. They had a winter coat sewn for her from a grey army blanket. The soldiers plucked buttons from their own jackets to help finish the gift. They also found her a new pair of shoes, sweater, scarf and pants. She opened her gift on a cold Christmas morning, and when she saw it, she excitedly put on this new jacket, a symbol of the devotion of her Canadian friends.

When the war ended, everyone was finally able to return home, and life began anew. Bob Elliot returned to Canada, but he kept in touch with the Cretier family over the years. In 1981, he paid them a visit. Upon reuniting, Bob and the now grown up Sussie fell in love and were soon married! Elliott brought Sussie home to Edmonton, where they lived, and the once little Dutch girl became a proud Canadian citizen.

The couple later donated the coat to the Canadian War Museum. It represents a story of friendship and love that spans decades, and the enduring bond forged between Canada and the Netherlands during the Second World War—a touching reminder of hope for Sussie, and of the brave Canadian soldiers who liberated Holland.