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People often say they want justice. They agree that life should be fair and that every individual should be treated equally. Usually, they mean it. Even though the world is broken, we can still discern the difference between right and wrong especially in times of great contrast.

Putting ideas into practice can be harder than merely speaking them. What if, for instance, instead of acknowledging that Hitler's regime was evil in front of your friends, you were forced with making the decision of whether to hide a Jew and his family, knowing that you would risk being taken to a concentration camp, being tortured, and dying at the hands of ruthless Nazis?

The German occupation was fierce. It forcibly took over about 80 countries and territories, including the Netherlands, which the Germans invaded on May 10, 1940. The entire country was taken in only 5 days when the Netherlands surrendered. This followed the bombing of Rotterdam which left almost 80,000 people homeless. The people of the conquered nation fell into the hands of ruthlessly antisemitic Austrian Nazi and lawyer Arthur Seyss-Inquart, who was given this position by Adolph Hitler himself.

In January of 1941, the Germans imposed a mandatory registration of all Jews. 159,806 Jews, persons born of mixed marriages, and Jewish refugees from Germany were listed. The Reich wasted no time in arresting the Jews and sending them to concentration camps. They took hundreds of young Jews to the concentration camp known as Buchenwald by February. From there they were sent to the Mauthausen camp where almost all of them were murdered. After this, they proceeded to segregate the Jews and placed 15,000 of them in labor camps with the

help of Dutch collaborators. This caused Dutch workers to start a strike on February 25, 1941, in protest of this unethical treatment. They were joined by many workers' organizations, but after three days the brave effort was suppressed by the brutal Nazis. In spite of this, it is still remembered and memorialized to this day as the February strike.

Foreign and stateless Jews were sent to a camp called the Westerbork Transit, during the concentration of Jews in Amsterdam, located in the northeast area of the country. Some provincial Jews were sent to another camp called Vught. On April 29, 1942, all Jews were required to wear the Star of David. When deportation started in 1942, 107,000 Jews were taken to death camps, such as Auschwitz and Sobibor, packed into trains like cattle. Out of these, 5,200 survived. The deportation ended in September 1944 when the Allies began to retake the country.

Yes, the occupied Netherlands was a dangerous place for Jews. Even their own countrymen might turn against them. One out of four Jews were arrested and handed over to the Germans by the ordinary Dutch police. There were also Dutch informers who were willing to betray their own countrymen. But while some followed the Nazis' lead, there were those who stood up against them. They were known as the Dutch Resistance. They hid 25,000 to 30,000 Jews, and by the fall of 1944 around 60,000 to 200,000 landlords and caretakers were taking part in this effort.

One of these brave men and women was a watchmaker named Cornelia "Corrie" ten Boom. She built contacts with other Resistance members who helped her hide Jews behind a false wall in her family's home. The house was raided by the Gestapo on February 28, 1944. At the time of the raid, six people were hiding behind the wall, but the Nazis were unable to find them. However, other Resistance members came not knowing the house was being searched. The end result was that 30 people were arrested in the ten Boom house that day, including Corrie, her

father, sisters, brother, other family, and Resistance members. Corrie was temporarily sent to a penitentiary in Scheveningen with her sister, Betsie, and father, Casper, who passed away there. Afterwards, she and Betsie were taken to Vught and then later Ravensbruck, where Betsie passed away that winter. Such was the cost of doing the right thing.

Finally, in 1944, the Allies began to take the Netherlands. The first to cross the country's border was the American 30th Infantry Division. They came into Mesch, a small Dutch village, on September 12, 1944, and overtook the province's capital, Maastricht, the next day.

Starting on the 17th of September, 1944, the U.S. and Great Britain joined forces for an operation known as "Market Garden". 20,000 American Soldiers parachuted into the southern Netherlands. Their objective was to capture several bridges along important Dutch canals. Although the operation was unsuccessful due to the 1st British Airborne's failure to capture a bridge at Arnhem, it was both the greatest U.S. deployment in the Netherlands and the largest airborne drop in history.

The 7th American Armored Division started one of the fiercest battles in Western Europe on September 30, 1944: the Battle of Overloon. It was one of the largest tank battles in the Netherlands. They were aided by the 11th British Armoured and 3rd British Infantry Divisions, and in October the battle ended. Its victory came at a price. Over 3,100 people were killed, including 2,500 American and British Soldiers, and the cities Overloon and Venray were on the verge of complete obliteration.

The U.S. not only fought for the freedom of the Netherlands, but also saved the people from starvation. A famine known as the "Hongerwinter" took place in the winter of 1944 due to a German blockade of the national railway company after a strike. It impacted 4,500,000 people,

and 18,000 Dutch people died with the primary cause of starvation. The Germans and the Allies agreed to a temporary cease-fire for humanitarian food drops. The drops were known as “Operation Manna” (British) and “Operation Chowhound” (U.S.). They succeeded in dropping 22,000,000 pounds of food!

On May 5, 1945, the German Commander-in-Chief Johannes Blaskowitz surrendered. Sadly, 13,000 Allied soldiers were killed in the fighting for the Netherlands from September 1944 to May 1945, including 1,135 Americans.

What we learn from this time is that we have to be willing to fight for life and liberty. It is especially necessary to stand up for justice when things are hard because so much more is at stake in darker times, and it is especially obligatory when you have the ability to end the atrocity. If we had not played a role in the liberation of the Netherlands, considerably more innocent lives would have been taken.

Which brings us to the second point: how would my life and future be different if Americans had not fought and died during this operation? Significantly more people would have starved, been used as forced labor, experimented on, and murdered. Europe would still live under the thumb of the 3rd Reich. I would never have been born in a safe Germany as the daughter of an American Soldier. I would never have been able to see the peaceful Netherlands or the hiding place where the ten Boom family courageously hid Jews, even knowing the cost. Instead, we would live with the large threat of Nazi Germany looming overhead.

The U.S. made a great impact on the world and the future because it put its ideals into practice instead of merely speaking them, stood up for what is right, and by doing so liberated the country of the Netherlands.

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