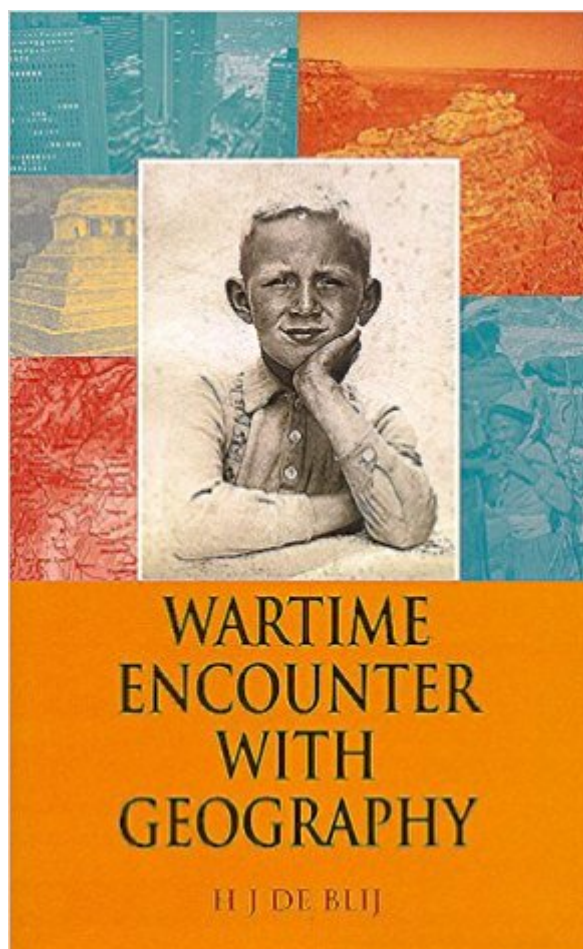


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Wartime Encounter With Geography



Synopsis

This book presents a child's eye view of life in occupied Holland during World War II. While the author waited for the Allies to liberate his country he immersed himself in geography lessons, which gave him a window on the world. Today he is a geography professor at Marshall University in Huntington, W. Va., and the geography analyst for NBC News.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

One of the best and most well-written memoirs of a childhood under Nazi rule. Like Wolfgang Samuel's "German Boy," it describes the struggle of civilians to survive in war, basically powerless against the enemy soldiers, against arbitrary governments where concern for human rights has vanished, and against cold and starvation. Cycling to work was a daily act of bravery, gathering fuel and food took (for these starved, freezing people) a superhuman effort. Those who made it relied on determination, forethought, friendship, and luck. Many Dutch civilians did not survive the war. They were sent to concentration camps or slave labor in Germany. Hundreds were murdered in retaliation for acts by the Resistance. They were killed in Allied bombing as liberation approached. In the part of the Netherlands still occupied by the Germans, about 18,000 people died of starvation in the last winter of the war. De Blij raises interesting general questions about many aspects of war, including whether the gains from the Resistance actions were worth the horrific cost to civilian and the way the society dealt with collaboration after the war. It is almost impossible for Americans today to imagine the horror of life under Nazi rule. De Blij provides a detailed description of everyday life for those we don't often think about, the average citizen who is not in a targeted group (not Jewish,

gypsy, homosexual, disabled, mentally ill, dissident... the list goes on). It is not like this experience has gone away- children all over the world have lived through it recently, in places from the Congo to Columbia to Kosovo to Iraq to Syria... I think most Americans (especially young adults) would benefit from reading this book, if only to gain understanding of what war is really like.

Of the thousands of horrifying, somber, moving events that occurred during the time frame of the Third Reich, this story could not have been better retold than through the eyes of the Dutch geographer Harm de Blij. This story hit a personal note in more ways than one. One reason being is, I am geographer myself, even before attending university. It also sent chills down my back when I read that Harm de Blij lived about 1 km from where I lived in Soest while my father was stationed at Soesterberg Air Base in the early 1990's. While I lived in the beautiful small city in the central Netherlands, I used to wonder what life was like, what happened, what did it feel like to live under Nazi occupation. After reading this book, I now have a better feeling of what occurred. I hope one day that I will return to the Netherlands and Soest with my young daughter, and tell her stories about my life in The Netherlands. I also wish to meet with Dr. Harm de Blij and further discuss this book, as well as geography in general

The understated title of this short, well-written book did not prepare me for the profound impact of this story. In fact, I was compelled to read it cover to cover in one evening. Harm de Blij relates the account of his childhood in Holland during World War II, when his family's idyllic existence is transformed into a challenge for survival. Seen through the eyes of a pre-adolescent, the ability to transcend the perils of German occupation and focus on their love of music and geography reflects the triumph of the human spirit over adversity. The intensity of their struggle to maintain some semblance of their former life and survive the war is truly inspirational. This is a "must read" for young and old alike.

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