

The Story – 10 May 1940

It is **10 May 1940**. In a small Dutch village, not far from here, the day begins like any other. Life carries on as usual. The milkman makes his rounds, the priest stands by the church and local police officer De Laat stops for a chat. Meanwhile, two cousins, **Maria and Riet**, are talking about Riet's upcoming wedding to her fiancé **Peter**, a Dutch soldier.

The mobilisation has brought Peter and Riet together. Despite the fear of war in Europe, they are looking forward to their wedding and to the life they have planned together.

But that morning, everything changes.

The Message

Municipal secretary Bosman arrives hurriedly on his bicycle. Together with police officer De Laat, he goes to Café Seelen, where the radio is switched on. Those present listen tensely to the voice of Queen Wilhelmina.

The Netherlands is at war.

The peace in the village is over.

The Dutch soldiers, led by **Lieutenant Van Oudheusden**, immediately take action. The troops are sent to their positions. Police officer De Laat is ordered to inform the mayor and bring the civilians to safety.

For the villagers, it is difficult to comprehend what is happening. Some follow the order to leave, while others protest. For Riet, there is only one thing that matters: she wants to go to Peter.

But the police officer stops her.

There is no time left to say goodbye. Riet and Peter can only wave to each other from a distance before they disappear from each other's sight.

The First Attacks

While the civilians are being evacuated, Lieutenant Van Oudheusden tries to contact the headquarters of the Territorial Commander in North Brabant, Colonel Schmidt. But the telephone connection is suddenly cut off.

Then the air-raid siren sounds.

Heavy explosions can be heard in the distance. Dutch soldiers take up their positions as the first German attacks begin.

The war, which until that moment had seemed like something distant, something heard about through newspapers and radio reports, is now suddenly very real.

A courier arrives with new orders. German troops have been spotted in the sector.

Soon afterwards, the fighting begins.

The Battle

The Dutch soldiers attempt to defend their position as German artillery shells begin to hit. Explosions, smoke and gunfire fill the battlefield.

There are casualties on both sides.

As the dust slowly settles, the Dutch soldiers attempt to retake their positions. But the German troops continue their attack. What follows is a short and fierce battle.

Eventually, Lieutenant Van Oudheusden sees no other option.

He orders his men to lay down their weapons.

The Dutch soldiers are taken prisoner. Van Oudheusden reports to the German commander and surrenders the position and the village. He makes one condition: **the civilians must remain unharmed.**

The German commander agrees.

But for the villagers, the suffering has already begun.

Peter's Death

Among the Dutch soldiers killed during the battle is **Peter van de Heuvel**, a conscript serving with 3-I-6 R.I.

Peter and Riet had imagined a very different future. They were engaged and had been making plans for their wedding and their life together.

Now Peter is dead.

For Riet, an uncertain and painful period begins. She later discovers that she is pregnant with Peter's child. As an unmarried single mother, she must endure the war years alone.

As if that were not enough, the German soldiers take the food and drinks that had been prepared in the cellar for the upcoming wedding.

The plans for a happy life have disappeared completely in a single morning.

The Beginning of Five Years of Occupation

As the Dutch soldiers are taken away, the civilians slowly return.

For them, a new reality begins: **the German occupation**.

The war is not over. Far from it.

For the inhabitants of this village, a period of more than four years of occupation now begins. They will not regain their freedom until the autumn of **1944**.

What began as an ordinary morning in a Dutch village ended in war, loss and uncertainty.

And for Riet, the war began with the greatest loss imaginable: losing the man with whom she had wanted to share her future.