

Story of Zwerus (John) de Nooij (Blue Johnny)

Helping at St Elisabeths Gasthuis

John was working in Heelsum when the paratroopers landed near Wolfheze. He went there and spoke to a leading paratrooper where they told him they were on their way to the Hospital in Arnhem. John asked whether he could walk with them as he knew the area and could probably help with information and translations. The medical troop, with all their equipment, went via minor pathways and avoiding major roads, via Oosterbeek to Arnhem, where they installed themselves at the St. Elizabeth's Hospital. The Germans had in the meantime fled and John mixed with the nurses, doctors and the rest of the staff. He was aware that behind the hospital was a railway line with a number of railway carriages loaded with stolen goods and food that the Germans had taken from the Dutch. So, after dark, when there were no guards about (they had fled away), he went there, opened a carriage, gathered as much as he could of the beautiful cherries from the Betuwe, and with them, returned to the hospital, and was welcomed by the wounded men and the medical staff. He fed them like this for several days.

John had left home to go to the paratroopers and, after a few days, he realised that nobody at home knew where he was. Public telephones had been disconnected by the Germans, and he suddenly realised that there was a telephone at the hospital. He picked it up to see if it was working and it was. He recalled that some phone connections were working illegally (used by the resistance). So he rang home and a prominent member of the Dutch Resistance answered the phone. When that man realised that it was Zwerus on the phone he immediately called out, "Quickly, run and tell your Mother that Zwerus is alive." She must have been very relieved. He then asked where John was and asked how the situation in Arnhem was. John let him know the name of a Doctor at the hospital and he also arranged for John to be at the phone at certain hours from that time on to be able to contact him.

It was from the hospital that John was able to help with the evacuation of several of the airmen, including General Hackett whom he met later at the Aunt's house.