

Het Snotneusje (“Whippersnaper”)*

by
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The date was May 7th, 1945 (two days earlier the German army officially surrendered to the Allied forces, and the Second World War in Europe was over). After suffering five long years of German occupation and a winter with extreme food shortage (elderly Dutchmen still speak of the famine of “de hongervinter”), the residents of Amsterdam celebrated at “the Dam,” the central plaza in Amsterdam. The celebration included playing happy music by one of the still-working Dutch street organs named “het Snotneusje” (Fig. 1).



Figure 1 Gijs Perlee's draaiorgel "het Snotneusje" in the 1950s. All the damage caused by the gunfire had been repaired at this time.

The liberation festivities had irritated a group of disgruntled German SS soldiers who were drinking in their “Grote Club” (on the corner of the Kalverstraat and the Dam) and wondering about their future (Fig. 4). That afternoon they went outside



with their machine guns and fired random salvos at the crowd. Several people were killed and many were wounded.



Figure 3 A close-up of the street scene illustrates the group of spectators hiding behind the front of the organ.

By sheer luck the organ grinder, who was working on the side of the organ facing the gunners, managed to get behind the instrument himself. Onlookers ran, and dozens of people took cover behind the street organ, which was then riddled with machine gun bullets (Figs 2 & 3).

According to my dictionary the word 'snotneusje' should be translated as “snotty nose.” Figuratively, the word means something like brat, urchin, or whippersnaper — take your pick. The organ was rather small but loudly voiced.



Figure 4 Situation Map: 1. Het Snotneusje playing nearby streetcar track; 2. Grote Club at corner Kalverstraat; 3. Position of shooters

The draaiorgel “het Snotneusje” is known to be the bravest organ of the Netherlands, and it is now preserved in the Amsterdam Historic museum.

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Figure 2 May 7th, 1945 — het Snotneusje stops the bullets

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