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DAILY SHIPPING NEWSLETTER

JAN DE HARTOG SPECIAL



Jan de Hartog, who has died in Houston, Texas, aged 88, was a bestselling Dutch writer whose novel **Holland's Glory** inspired the national spirit of Netherlanders during the early years of the German occupation in the Second World War.

Published in Dutch 10 days before the outbreak of war, it was an account of sailors in ocean-going tugs, which not only sold one million copies but reinforced the Netherlanders' sense of identity. It was read no less avidly by Germans for its insights on the Dutch character.

Early in 1942, de Hartog received a letter warning him that he was on the list of those to be arrested, and left his wife and children. At first he hid in a home for old ladies at Amsterdam, where he was known to the inmates as "**Miss Flying Heart**" and occasionally had to don a wig, pince-nez and women's clothing. But when he discovered that the Gestapo had started looking in earnest for him at his publishers he decided to flee the country.

His escape involved a journey across Belgium, Switzerland, France and Portugal. At one point he had to hide in a coffin; at another he was wounded in the legs when a German patrol attacked the seven-man party of which he was a member, with the result that he had difficulty walking for the rest of his life. He was carried the remainder of the way over the Pyrenees by a large Russian.

When he finally arrived in England in July 1943, he weighed only seven stone. But on presenting himself at the War Office he found that his escape had taken so long that the information he had been given about dropping zones for agents was out of date.

DAILY SHIPPING NEWSLETTER



The son of a professor of theology at Amsterdam University, Jan de Hartog was born at Haarlem on April 22 1914. De Hartog's vivid imagination was encouraged by his father. This did not stop him, at 10, joining a fishing smack in the Zuider Zee as one of the under-age sailors known as "sea mice" because they had to be hidden from official view.

On his return home, de Hartog took a course at the Training College for Seamanship in Amsterdam, and published his first story under the pseudonym "**Eckmar**" aged 21. During the next few years he settled down with his first wife Vidia, who bore him a son and a daughter, and combined work at sea with his writing. In 1939, he wrote the scenario for a film, **Somewhere in Holland**, in which he took the leading role because the main actor had fallen out.

On arriving in England in 1943, de Hartog offered some encouraging insights on occupied Europe. "The morale of German troops in the Netherlands depends on whether they are sober or drunk," he declared. "If they are sober they are winning the war. If they are drunk they are weeping on each other's shoulders."



Already with a strong inclination towards pacifism, he declined to join the Armed Forces, and worked in Bristol with stranded Dutch merchant navy skippers during the rest of the war.

Although Holland's Glory was an enormous success, de Hartog declined to allow it to be translated into English. He decided to remain in England, where he married Angela Wyndham Lewis, J B Priestley's stepdaughter, with whom he had a son and a daughter, and settled down to concentrate on writing in English.



His play **Skipper Next to God**, about a captain carrying stateless Jews to the Americas where they are less than welcome, was put on at the Embassy in 1945. The Daily Telegraph's critic W A Darlington was impressed with the sincerity with which he played the leading role, though he felt the playwright lacked the experience to give the plot the necessary twists and tension.

Nevertheless it was later performed on Broadway, though when the American author Ben Hecht used it for a benefit night to aid his League for a Free Palestine, de Hartog cabled instructions from Britain to insist that it must not be used to attack Britain.

Darlington was less impressed by Death of a Rat at the Lyric, Hammersmith, which offered a loose plot taking in astrology and the atomic bomb. But de Hartog had an undoubted success in the mid-1950s with the **The Four Poster**, a comedy about married love starring Michael Denison and Dulcie Gray at the Ambassadors, which he had begun writing while hiding in Amsterdam.

The play went to Paris, where it was translated into French by Colette, and then America. It also became a television drama, and later a musical **I Do, I Do**, featuring Ian Carmichael and Anne Rogers.

But de Hartog's talents were better suited to fiction which drew on his personal experience and his ability to write sensitively with a quiet humour. His novels included **The Lost Sea (1958)**, which combined a story of the illegal boy apprentices sailing with the fishing fleets on the Zuider Zee with a

DAILY SHIPPING NEWSLETTER

fairy tale; and **The Artist (1968)**, about an old Dutchman living in a houseboat on the Seine, prompting V S Naipaul in the Telegraph to compare him with Paul Gallico.

There was also **Stella (1951)**, which was turned into an unmemorable film, with Sophia Loren and William Holden, and **The Spiral Road (1957)**, an equally uninspiring vehicle for Rock Hudson.

Although de Hartog lived abroad for most of his life, he used to say "Wherever you are, you are always a Dutchman". After living for a few years in England, he moved to France where he had a windjammer called The Rival, moored on the Seine at Paris.

When there was some particularly severe flooding in Holland in 1953, he fitted up The Rival as a hospital ship with 60 beds, a doctor and two nurses, and sailed to the victims of the flood.

The profits from his novel **The Small Ark (1953)**, which gives an account of the disaster, were devoted to a fund for the victims. The book was translated into many languages and was also later made into a film.

After marrying his third wife **Marjorie Mein**, de Hartog became a Quaker and embarked on a four-volume history of the Society of Friends and settled for some years in Houston.

For more than two years, he worked as an auxiliary nurse in a hospital for the poor, while also being professor of creative writing at the local university. The experience resulted in **The Hospital (1965)**, a horrifying factual account of the casual treatment of negro patients, which led to the building of a new Hospital of the Poor. In another novel, **The Children**, also written whilst in Houston, he asked for compassion to be shown towards the war orphans of Korea and Vietnam. With the proceeds from his book he financed a help programme and adopted two Korean children.

During his later years de Hartog settled in East Coker, Somerset, where he enjoyed reciting T S Eliot's verse and Latin poetry, and wrote his adventure novels **The Captain (1967)** and **The Commodore (1986)**, which featured a tugboat captain on convoys to Murmansk during the war and on a journey from Rotterdam to Taiwan, via South America, 20 years later. Even in his seventies, de Hartog lost none of his power to fascinate women, but his penultimate novel **The Centurion (1989)**, dealt sensitively and convincingly with dowsing and reincarnation, in which he came to believe.

After **The Outer Buoy (1994)**, a futuristic story of old age, love and the ultimate voyage, de Hartog was working on Mud, which was to deal with the reclamation of land from the sea by the Dutch. For all his success de Hartog was always self-deprecating about his talents, saying that when he read Conrad, he told himself, "Jan, go and sell fish".



Friday December 6th, 2002 the ocean going tug **SMITWIJS SINGAPORE** which was in the Port of Rotterdam was mobilized to the Wilhelminakade in Rotterdam, where family members of **Jan de Hartog** came together which were carrying the urn with the ashes of the cremated Jan de Hartog.

After the family was welcomed onboard the **SMITWIJS SINGAPORE**, the vessel departed 11:00 hrs LT from the Wilhelminakade enroute the Indusbank North location .

DAILY SHIPPING NEWSLETTER



Top : The **SMITWIJS SINGAPORE** passing Vlaardingen outward bound – **Photo : Jan Simons.**

Right :

Capt. Gerrit Verschoor discusses with the family and pilot the location for the ceremony.



Below :

It was very busy at the wheelhouse sometimes during the trip with all family members interested in the vessel and crew.



DAILY SHIPPING NEWSLETTER

After passing the Northern breakwaters **Capt Gerrit Verschoor** turned the vessel in a North easterly direction and after 30 minutes lee was created and the vessel was stopped in the water so the family of **Jan de Hartog** could sprinkle the ashes out over the sea surface and remember him during this ceremony.



Left : the son of Jan, **Nick** carried the urn to the aft deck and prepares for the ceremony.



Right :

Jan's wife **Marjorie** and his son **Nick** sprinkle the ashes out over the sea surface in position : 52.02.5 N – 004.05.0 E at 13.10 hrs LT



Left & below :

After his wife and son sprinkled the ashes other family members throw some flowers in the water and a moment of remembrance was held with the whole family.



DAILY SHIPPING NEWSLETTER



After the ceremony was completed the **SMITWIJS SINGAPORE** headed back for the Wilhelminakade in Rotterdam, the family was disembarked again and returned home.



**Special compiled by:
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