

Netherlands Documentation Project Interview Summary

RG-50.570*0004

Mrs. Trudel (Trude) van Reemst – de Vries. Born November 22, 1914 in Frankfurt a/d Mainz, Germany

Date of Interview: July 18, 2004

Location: Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Short Summary

Trudel van Reemst is a Jewish woman, born in Germany but brought up in the Netherlands. She went to Spain to help the communists in their fight against fascism in the 1930's. She worked in Spain as a nurse. She became a communist herself. She was active in resistance. She was arrested in November 1942. She was in Westerbork from Dec 1942 until June or July 1943. In Westerbork she was involved with resistance. She worked in the hospital. She left the camp in 1943 because Jews married to non-Jews were sent home. She joined the resistance in Amsterdam.

After the interview

Some days after the interview Trude van Reemst telephoned the interviewer. She was not satisfied with the way she had ended the interview. She felt that she was complaining much too much and being too critical about the Netherlands and the Dutch people. She wanted to end the interview with a positive note. She would like to end her story with a quote of her friend Haakon Stotijn, secretary of the Dutch Commission of Peace (Nederlands Vredescomité: "There is no Catholic peace, nor a Protestant, Communist or a Socialist peace. Peace is one and indivisible from all people and for all people."

Long Summary

Tape 1

Her family was not religious, but very Jewish, she tells. They kept holidays and Shabbat. Her father was German (?), her mother French. In 1920 the family moved to Saarbrücken. In 1925 the family moved to the Netherlands. She lives in Eindhoven and Dordrecht and later in The Hague.

She was a member of a Jewish Youth organization but she got in trouble because she criticized the Zionist movement. She was worried about the faith of the Arabs living in Palestine. She was kicked out of the movement and they called her a "communist". She did not know what a communist was, but she wanted to find out. She started to read and she met left-wing people like Ben Polak. Her parents were not political.

She started to work in Rotterdam as a nurse in training. She signed up to go to Spain with an organization of Social Democrats. Leaders were Dr. Sajet and Dr. Schrijver. She went to Spain in April 1937. About 700 Dutch men and women went to Spain. Half of them did not survive. Of the people that returned to the Netherlands about half died during WWII. Most of them were active in the resistance.

About Spain. And about the friends she made and the friends she lost:

Krijn Breur, shot by Germans in WWII

Kik van Kreeveld, died in a concentration camp in WWII

When she returned to the Netherlands she lost her Dutch citizenship. In the Netherlands an economic crisis is going on. She witnessed the rise of NSB, the Dutch Nazi Party.

Back home she immediately got involved with resistance. Germany had not invaded the Netherlands yet. But Trude helped refugees from Germany, Jews and socialists. They were in the Netherlands illegally and they needed food and shelter. She met Werner Stertzenbach.

Trude lived in Vlaardingen not far from Rotterdam when the invasion began. She knew what was coming. She knew about the situation in Germany. She was in a small resistance group consisting mainly of German immigrants. They found hiding places and food. Her husband was involved with another resistance group, a more military group with Dr. Gerrit Kastein and Krijn Breur and Jan Ric van Gilsen.

When Krijn was arrested a passport picture of Trude was found in his house.

Tape 2

About the resistance group and the work.

She knew about the concentration camps in Germany for communists and socialists.

On November 22, 1942 Krijn was arrested in The Hague on his way to Trude's birthday. Trude and her husband were also arrested and brought to Scheveningen. There was a J on the door of her cell, which meant that she got half the amount of food that non-Jewish prisoners got. She was interrogated. She had to eyewitness how somebody else was tortured. "You will go through the chimney in Lublin", a German told her.

One day the Germans called all Jewish prisoners to come forward. Trude did not respond; all Jewish prisoners were deported. Trude was found the next day. She was beaten and she was brought to the Jewish Council in The Hague. She was then deported to Westerbork. She was ill and went to the hospital in the camp. Here she was visited by her good friend Werner. Werner told her that she was safe. He had taken her card out of the camp's administration so on paper she was not in the camp. This meant that she could not be put on the lists for the trains to the East. She joined a resistance group in the camp.

Werner was able to get people out the camp. He was working for the small crematorium just outside the camp. There he had two radios. He had some other jobs in the camp as well. He had contact with people outside the camp. He could smuggle people out of the

camp if they pretended to be a corpse. He would then have to take the corpse to the crematorium. Trude knew that Hanny Levi, married to Rudy, was smuggled out of the camp.

Trude talks about the situation in the camp. As a nurse she worked in the hospital. She told about how women who were breastfeeding did not have to go on transports. So they would try to keep the women breastfeeding as long as possible.

She talked about camp commander Gemmeker. Trude was eyewitness to how Gemmeker decided to help a child that born too early. He made sure that the baby Michieltje got all possible care. Specialists were called in from other hospitals. When Michieltje weighed 3 kilos he was put on a transport to the East. Trude was one of the nurses who had to take care of Michieltje.

Suddenly news came that all Jews married to non-Jews were being released from Westerbork. Trude could go home. Werner organized a paper for her with stamps and everything stating that her papers were lost in Westerbork

Trude talked more about the important people in the camp: Gemmeker, Schlesinger. And in the hospital Dr. Spanien.

About the transport list and transport.

Tape 3

When Trude and her husband were arrested, her son was given into the care of good friends. Her husband was taken to Vught and later to Dachau.

She was in Westerbork from Dec 1942 till June or July 1943.
She talked more about life in Westerbork, about the weekly transports.

When she was released from Westerbork she returned to her house in Vlaardingen. She talked about the people who were living there and how she was not welcome in her own house anymore. She moved to Amsterdam.

In Amsterdam she lived with Louise Kautsky. She was again active in resistance. She was a courier, she was involved in illegal newspapers and she helped people in hiding.

She talked more about the German and Dutch Jews in Westerbork.
She talked about the Jewish Council.

She talked about the Netherlands.

Correct spelling of some names mentioned in the video testimony:

Krijn Breur
Trijn
Tonnie
Werner Stertzenbach
Gerrit Kastein
Jan Ric van Gilsen
Gerrit Kastein
Hanny Levi, Rudy Levi
Hedwig de Kat
Gerda Brautigam
Louise Kautsky
Mo Polak
Rudy Bloemgarten
Eli Cohen
Gemmeker
Schlesinger
Dr. Spanien (?)