Netherlands Documentation Project
Time-Coded Notes

Interview with Trudel van Reemst (born 11/22/1914 in Frankfurt am Main, Germany), June 18, 2004
RG-50.570*0004
Spelling of names marked * has not been verified

TCR 1

1.01: Trudel van Reemst talks about how her parents met. Her father a Dutchman, her mother French. Father was from very Jewish family, observing all the holy days and the Sabbath.

1.03: her father was from the Dutch town of Zevenbergen, which had a small Jewish community. There was a temple. Her uncle was a kosher butcher.

1.03: before coming to the Netherlands she lived in Frankfurt am Main and Saarbrücken.

1.04: Going to school in Saarbrücken, the girl whom she shared her desk with would always put a notebook or a chalkboard in between them, because she did not want her apron to touch the apron of a Jewish girl. After school there would be yelling, name calling and rock throwing. "That made a deep impression." When T. got home crying and explained what had happened, her mother told her that it was something to be proud of. T. says that to this day she does not understand what it is that she ought to be proud of. Being proud of being pelted with rocks makes you just as bad a person as the people throwing the rocks, she says.

1.05: When the family moved to Frankfurt, she did not notice any anti-Semitism. There was a large Jewish community in Frankfurt, so maybe she was to well protected to notice.

1.06: the girls from her school would call her things like "Saujüdin", Jewish pig.

1.07: in 1925 she went back to the Netherlands to stay with her aunt in Eindhoven to learn Dutch (she only spoke German up to that point).

1.08: talks about having no memory of the Netherlands being very different from Germany in terms of anti-Semitism. Rather, she had to catch up in school. She was two years behind her age group as a result.

1.09: no memory of anti-semitism in The Hague. Except for Kopperman*, her geography in secondary school. He was a Jew, but also one of the first members of the Dutch national-socialist movement (NSB). An anti-Semite, he picked on T., was both physically and mentally abusive.

1.10: talks about the Depression and joining the Jewish Youth Movement. "Only politics I knew was the history of Jewry."

1.11: she opposed Arabs being thrown out of Palestine in the 30s and was expelled from the Jewish Youth Movement as a result. She was labeled a communist, which she was not, she says. She got really interested in politics then. She got to know Emmy Andriessen and Ben Polak.

1.13: Talks about what kind of information she got from Germany about the Jews. They saw immigrants, they started to understand a little.

1.14: she became a trainee-nurse in Rotterdam. Her political development started taking shape in ca. 1935. She was struck by the outbreak Spanish Civil War.

1.15: Talks about volunteering for the Spanish Republicans.

1.16: mentions Ben Sajet*, “uncle Ben”, who accepted her as a nurse for work in Spain.

1.17: Fired by hospital for wanting to go to Spain, although not on the spot as she requested, but with six weeks notice.

1.18: She was issued a blank passport by the government, through help from the committee that organized help for Spain. That was unusual because the Dutch government included stamps in newly issued passports that said “not for travel to Spain”.

1.19: lost citizenship anyway when she married a doctor who went to Spain on clandestinely. As an aside, she mentions how the Dutch government was the first to recognize Franco’s regime, even though the civil war was not over.

1.20: She talks about being stateless in the Netherlands. Also about order to stateless Jews not to live in the coastal areas, which applied to her town Vlaardingen. Her husband gets an exemption.

1.21: Going to Spain and ending up in the Valencia province in April ’37. Speaking no Spanish, having language mix ups.

1.24: talks about her inexperience in nursing and the realities of war nursing.

1.26: Anecdote about illiterate nurses who she tries to teach to take temperatures of patients.

1.27: more talk about translation difficulties.

1.29: In Villanueva Lajara*, a Dutch hospital was setup after the Republicans saw it was more effective to treat patients in their own language.

1.34: Talks about non-intervention commission of the League of Nations.

1.35: talks of friends gained through the civil war after being asked about friends lost. One is Krijn Breuer*, a 22-year-old (or 23) who got paralyzed. They remained in touch into the war.

1.39: Krijn Breuer would be shot in the war in the Netherlands.

1.40: talks about political affiliations of those who served in the International Brigades.

1.41: Prime Minister Aznar at one point offered Spanish citizenship to Dutch International Brigade members. T. only knows of one person who accepted.

1.42: Men who returned from Spain lost their citizenship upon arrival in the Netherlands.

1.44: T. talks of returning to the Netherlands on December 5, 1938, "Sinterklaasavond".

1.49: talk about fate of German immigrants during the late 1930s and the period directly after the Dutch surrender of May 1940.

1.51: Spain veterans felt more imminent danger from Nazi Germany, while those who stayed home were more confident about Dutch ability to maintain neutrality.

1.52: Spain veterans could tell different German planes by their sound.

1.54: People were naïve in trusting that "it would not be so bad", says T. In that respect Vlaardingen was a relatively good place – maybe it had to do with the history of the "Geuzen", the so-called Beggars who stood up against the Spanish early in the Dutch Uprising in the 16th century. Even so, resistance was clumsy, says T.

1.59: Talks about the "Artsenkamer", the guild-like organization for doctors that the Nazis set up for every professional group. In Vlaardingen, all but three doctors joined.

TCR 2

2.00: T. says most of her and her husband's friends were Jews, but that that really did no matter. You are a Jew when you are religious, it is not an ethnic thing, she says. A matter of faith, not of ethnicity. She left the Jewish community officially, by paying 5 guilders (a substantial part of her monthly wage of 12,50 guilders) to have a bailiff (or sheriff) to properly give notice to the community.

2.02: Talks about being in German resistance group in the Netherlands. T. was arrested on November 23, 1943 [this must be a mistake seeing as she says she was in Westerbork from December '42 to July '43 later on] and taken to Scheveningen.
The group did such things as finding hiding places, smuggling papers to Germany, funneling food stamps: "small works."

2.03: Husband was in a more military group. Along with Gerrit Kastijn*, Krijn Breuer*.

TCR 3

3.00: talks about being in the German group in the Netherlands that continued its work into the war. They concentrated on getting illegal identification. It became harder to find hiding places.

3.02: Hard to get people to keep quiet. Work of the group focused on German individuals. Mostly they hid them in the city, where they stood out less.

3.03: T. does not know how many, but they probably hid dozens of people.

3.05: T. says she is still proud of her ability to forge identification and food stamps.

3.07: Politically her group was left wing, she says.

3.09: Talks about being cautious in keeping resistance activity under the radar for neighbors.

3.10: Talks about the bombing of Rotterdam, recognizing the sound of the planes.

3.12: Talks about the role of the Luftwaffe (German airforce) in Spanish Civil War.

3.13: Initially little changed after the Dutch surrender, people often say. "Not for me," says T. I knew about the first concentration camps for socialists, communists, and humanists.

3.16: Talks about Krijn Breuer children being brought to the Scheveningen prison.

3.20: Talks about how there was a mark of "J" on her door post in prison. That meant she got half the rations and was only let out for walk twice a week instead of daily.

3.22: Talks about being questioned in jail. The interrogators did not know much. At one point she was forced to watch as an older Jewish man was beat up by the SD interrogators. There were always two interrogators and one female secretary. One man told her: "Du Sarah, du fährst nach Lublin" through the chimney. T. thought she was being called a witch, did not know it had to be taken literally. She says she knew not of the gas chambers.

Talks about hearing rumors in 1944 about the SD having cars that fill up with gas.

"We did not even know in Westerbork."

3.27: Talks about a night when all Jewish prisoners were told to come out of their cell. Her cellmate obliged, but T. stayed. Those prisoners went straight to Auschwitz without

getting off the train in Westerbork. Upon discovery the next day, T. was beaten for disobeying an order. Then she was taken to the Jewish Council in The Hague.

3.29: Talks about having no memory of going to Westerbork.

3.30: T. says about her disobeying the order in prison: “They did not know what to do with me.”

3.32: In Westerbork, she was hospitalized for a “nierbekkenontsteking” (pyelonefritis). It was the biggest hospital in the Netherlands.

3.33: Notto*, who was the liaison in her resistance group, sent a man to the hospital to ask how she could be helped. He also told her he had stolen her registration card from the “cartotheek”, the registry. From there on out, she did not officially exist in Westerbork.

3.37: Talks about Werner, a man who led a small resistance group in the province of Drenthe, in which Westerbork lies. He also worked in sewage maintenance.

3.38: Illustrates a case of escaping Westerbork. Hanny Levy (or Levi), whose fiancé was Rudi Baumgart* who belonged to the “groep bevolkingsregister” (possibly the group that set fire to the Amsterdam population registry – for lack of a better word).

3.43: Brother-in-law Ger van Reemst did it for me as a personal favor, says T. about his underground work.

3.44: Answers question about what was so horrible about working in Westerbork. T. says it is about what you experienced, what you saw: diphtheria among infants. After their deaths mothers would continue to breast feed other children because having to breast-feed meant being exempt from deportation.

3.45: “We did not know what would happen in Poland, I always say that.” What cost so dearly according to T. was that the underground had insufficient hiding places when the round-ups began. Also, many thought: God has helped us so far, he will help us after this. Families stuck together, even when splitting up raised individual chances of survival.

3.48: Relates another transport story that reflects the naiveté about what happened in the East.

3.49: T. says that people just expected the camps in the East to be “much worse” because they never heard back from the people who went there.
Tells a story that illustrates the particular cruelty of Westerbork commander Gemmecker, who was said to love children so much. One particular transport only had children on it – he gave them all a tomato for the trip.

3.53: Another story is that of a little boy: Michieltje ("Little Michiel"). Born prematurely, his mother was immediately put on transport. T. and her colleagues nursed him back to health. Gemmecker would check in everyday on his progress. First he was tube-fed. He made a slow but sure revovery. At six pounds and decent health, Gemmecker had him put on the next transport. (Also mentioned on 57 min.)

3.54: Talks about learning about the possibility to get out of Westerbork because she was married to a non-Jew.

3.55: Talks about how someone seemed to have acces to Gemmecker's stamps.

3.57: Gemmecker was a high-up officer, always correctly dressed and mannered, although somewhat festive. Gemmecker got off light after the war. T. talks about that he got a cigar shop as part of the "Wiedergutmachung" programs.

3.58: Gemmecker had Jewish-German assistant named Schlesinger* who according to T. could have been a high-ranking officer had it not been for being Jewish. He was a fascist. "Circumcision does not halt fascism," says T.

3.59: Talks about a Jewish doctor named Spanier*.

TCR 4

4.00: Talks about the "Ordnungsdienst", the camp orderlies that were prisoners.

4.01: the "barakoudste", the barrack elder, read out the names of those who would be transported. Talks about how transports worked in Westerbork.

4.02: Talks about the exchange rule that allowed for those with children in Palestine to be swapped for German PoWs. T.'s father who was in Westerbork at that time was eligible but did not apply: queuing was required and that was below him.

4.03: Talks about her father being transported.

TCR 5

5.01: Talks about arrangements to keep her son with foster parents. Received letters in Westerbork about how he was doing.

5.02: Communication with the outside world outside censored channels went via Werner's crematorium, which was outside the camp. Brother-in-law Ger would come there to bring and pick up messages.

5.04: Talks about what her husband di while she was in Westerbork.

5.05: Talks about how she slept in a bed on the third floor (fourth American) of the camp hospital.

5.06: T. worked every day of the week. In her time off she met with Werner.

5.07: New camp arrivals dumped there money in bathroom because the Ordnungsdienst would warn them the Germans would take it. Talks about how Werner built nets to capture the bills from the sewer, re-used the money.

5.10: T. was in Westerbork roughly from December 1942 to June 1943, although she does not remember exactly herself. "I suppressed a lot of things" about the war.

5.12: Talks about the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and how the Dutch crown prince asked her about things she does not remember.

5.14: Talks about avoiding detection by watch tower guards when helping someone escape.

5.15: Sanctions against escape were supposedly 10 people transported East for evert escapee. T. says she never knew if that was true, because the Germans simply filled their quota.

5.17: Talks about how the camp at first was guarded by Dutch police.

5.18: Talks about Cuban dictator Batista's treatment of the passenger aboard the ship St. Louis.

5.19: Talks about the passengers who ended up in the Amsterdam Lloyd hotel, which was more of detention center than a hotel.

5.21: Talks about dr. Eli Cohen, who saw inspecting new arrivals as an outing. T. says he would steal bread from the dying. Calls him a self-proclaimed crook.

5.24: Talks about Ludwig Poll* and Markus Grubel*. The latter managed to escape after being forced to help move the patients of the Jewish insane asylum in the "Apeldoornse Bos" (Apeldoorn Woods). He was a passenger on the St. Louis at 17.

5.25: Talks about a man named Kalmeijer* who could issue papers that said the holder was not entirely Jewish. He did that a lot.

5.26: Mentions a man named Jaap van Kroosdij*.

5.27: Talks about documentation of camp: the Germans thought their system was so great.

5.29: Brother-in-law Ger rented out T.'s house to "good Dutch people" (those who were ant-German). Very devout. Rented it out for the low price that T. and her husband paid. When she got out of Westerbork, they would not vacate it but only let her have the bedroom.

5.31: Talks about how these people went to the police to report that their landlady being there might be fishy. A "good" cop took the complaint and in turn warned T. Had it been his NSB-affiliated colleague, she would have been in trouble. The tenants also would not let her son stay with her. Her tenants refused her use of the phone. Later it turned out that they had never paid the phone bill, which had been in her name all that time. Anecdotes illustrate the cowardice she faced, says T.

5.33: Talks about having to sue her tenants to vacate the house after the war. The response initially was: "be glad you're still alive." Says it is unfortunate that that attitude was so widespread.

5.34: Tells of neighbor from two doors down was the only person who came over to bring her tea when she just arrived. T. mentions this was in summer of 1943.

5.35: Talks of move to Amsterdam to live with the widow of Karl Kautsky. Both women were Jewish, both were safe for the time being because of their marriages to non-Jews. Both marriages were supposed not to have existed because Kautsky was dead and husband of T. was in Germany. Forced into hiding.

5.37: Talks of hiding in 2e Jacob van Campenstraat [in the neighborhood "de Pijp", the Pipe]. She was known as "the nurse" there, because she wore her uniform all the time.

5.38: Talks about doing more underground work: delivering newspapers, hiding a person, listening to the radio, funneling food stamps. "The daily work."

One big scare was when she hid twenty blank IDs in her corset, which then broke while on the way home (on the Gerard Douplein, also in De Pijp).

5.41: Talks about how when the south of the Netherlands was liberated a commission was put together that addressed the famine north of the country's major rivers. T. was part of such a team. The plans of the commission worked, she says. She worked with a doctor called Mo Polak*, with whom she distributed "beschuit" (biscuits that taste like toast) and milk on the first day after liberation.

5.42: Talks about fear of having their supplies looted. Anecdote about getting to men to guard the supplies that were kept in a convent. The next morning, the pastor was only disturbed about two stranger sleeping in his convent (his prerogative). But nothing was stolen.

5.43: Answers “the feminist question”, whether she was taken seriously in the resistance as a woman. T. says she felt she was. Her experience in Spain added to her credibility, it gave her “a halo”.

5.44: T. says she only once trafficked weapons, several stenguns, to help out her friend Noor Diamant*.

5.45: Talks about going to a hospital in the Helmerbuurt area of Amsterdam, the Wilhelmina Gasthuis, where Noor Diamant used to work. They could take a bath there.

5.46: Talks about the relationship between German and Dutch Jews in Westerbork and how it was not very good. The Germans were better protected because they had been there longer. As a result, they had a lot of the jobs, which offered protection from being transported east.

5.48: Talks about the Jewish Council in Westerbork, who work at the arrival of transports. They did a lot of the processing.

5.49: Says there are things she just cannot talk about, but the main point were covered in this interview. She asks the interviewer to just accept that there are things she cannot discuss. They are too personal and emotional. Imagine stories like the one about the little baby boy Michieltje.

5.50: Talks about what will come of this interview. T. says she thinks she will never know. Upon answer that “it will be conserved, it will be kept,” she says: well, that’s why I did this, not out of vanity but the truth needs be known and stay known. As long as I live and I am *compos mentis*, I need to testify.

5.51: Talks about whether the full extent of what happened has been properly understood by the newer generations. She thinks that is not the case, that for example new generations do not fully realize the true nature of fascism. She talks about her horror at the way people talk about Moroccan and Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands.

5.52: Talks about the book “Het verlaten hotel”, the Deserted Hotel, about a building at the corner of the Nicolaas Witsenkade near the Dutch Centrtal Bank. The book is about the eyewitness experience of a little boy who lived across from the “hotel”. The boy is now a married man and the author, Miriam Elias* is his wife, whom he told his story.

5.53: Talks about the book club in the home [for the elderly, it is safe to assume. Elsewhere in the interview, someone comes by the drop off a meal] where she lives. One reader from the northern province of Friesland, where many people were hidden, said she never knew people were hidden close to where she lived. T. says how she told the woman that it was safer that way, if few people knew.

The other lady responded by saying: “But I would not have told.” That is another example of the naïveté that T. talks about.

5.54: Talks about whether the Netherlands changed because of the war. In some cases yes, in others not really. People now join in the commemoration of the dead on May 4, but T. also thinks there is more racism than before.

5.56: Talks about how people were angry when Jews reclaimed their possessions after the war. Example: when T. went to stay with Mrs. Kautsky, she left her cutlery with people she trusted. She stresses they were solidly anti-fascist. When she returned they told her she could have everything back, except for the knives. This was because their made was now used to using rust-free steel knives, as opposed to silver that needed polishing. T.’s husband exploded into a rage at this and got the knives back eventually, but the lady who had kept the cutlery thought it had been her right to keep it.