Truus Wijsmuller-Meijer



Geertruida (Truus) Meijer is geboren in Alkmaar op 21 april 1896. Ze was de dochter van Jacob Meijer en Bertha Hendrika Boer. Het was een hervormd-liberaal gezin. Ze leerde van haar ouders om altijd als het nodig is op te komen voor de mensen, die het meest verdrukt zijn. Truus volgt in Alkmaar twee jaar de Handelsschool. In 1913 verhuist het gezin naar Amsterdam. Ze kreeg haar eerste baan bij een bank en leerde Johannes (Joop) Franciscus Wijsmuller (1894), bankier bij de Javaansche Bank, kennen. Ze trouwden in 1922.

Truus was erg sociaal bewogen. Ze wordt bestuurslid en coördinator voor instellingen op neutrale grondslag. Zo is ze coördinator bij de Vereniging van Huiszorg en beheerder van een bewaarplaats voor kinderen van werkende vrouwen. Het werk is onbezoldigd. Ze is bestuurslid/directielid van sanatorium "Beatrixoord" in het Oosterpark. Ze wordt lid van de Nederlandse Vereniging voor Vrouwenbelangen en Gelijk Staatsburgerschap.

Keith Monroe, historicus van de Boy Scouts of America, schrijft na de oorlog het artikel *The way it was, Holland's heroic wartime scouts*, dat verschijnt in Boys Life. Hierin noemt hij dat Truus voor de oorlog *Den Mother* (Akela) was.

Truus was voor de oorlog actief met het Kindertransport. Tussen december 1938 en het uitbreken van de Tweede Wereldoorlog in september 1939 organiseert ze meerdere keren per week reizen met kinderen tot 17 jaar vanuit Nazigebied; meestal naar Engeland, maar ook naar Nederland en later naar België en Frankrijk. In verschillende steden werken de speciaal opgerichte "Kindercomités", sociaal werkers en vrijwilligers samen om de kinderen in veiligheid te brengen. Het zijn vooral vrouwen die de uitvoering van reis en verblijf van de kinderen op zich nemen. Vanaf maart 1939 is ze als bestuurder betrokken bij het Amsterdamse Burgerweeshuis waar vanaf dan Duitse vluchtelingenkinderen worden ondergebracht. De kinderen noemen haar 'tante Truus'. Zowel zij als haar man tonen zich nauw betrokken bij de kinderen. Ze komen in groepjes bij hen thuis logeren en Joop Wijsmuller neemt de kinderen mee op uitjes, bijvoorbeeld naar dierentuin Artis.

Toen Nederland zich overgaf op 14 mei 1940 regelde ze 5 bussen en vulde die met 80 joodse kinderen uit een kindertehuis om hen van IJmuiden naar Engeland te brengen. Onderweg naar IJmuiden verzamelden scouts nog eens 90 meer joden. Alle 170 bereikten Engeland. Ook tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog bracht ze Joodse kinderen en volwassenen in veiligheid en zorgde voor gezinshereniging. Als lid van Groep 2000 hield zij zich bezig met het versturen van voedselpakketten naar protestantse joden in kamp Westerbork, concentratiekamp Bergen-Belsen en concentratiekamp Theresienstadt. Ze was waarschijnlijk na Raoul Wallenberg de persoon die de meeste Joden heeft gered. Samen met anderen die voor het vooroorlogse Kindertransport werkten, heeft ze de levens van meer dan 10.000 Joodse kinderen, op de vlucht voor antisemitisme, gered. Daarnaast hielp ze met het in veiligheid brengen van geallieerde militairen en ondersteunde ze geallieerde

krijgsgevangenen. Ze ontving van Yad Vashem de onderscheiding Rechtvaardige onder de Volkeren.

Ze werd na de oorlog lid van de gemeenteraad in Amsterdam. Ze ontving diverse onderscheidingen en werd voor haar maatschappelijke inzet benoemd tot Ridder in de Orde van Oranje-Nassau en Officier in de Orde van Oranje Nassau.

Truus Wijsmuller is overleden op 30 augustus 1978 in Amsterdam.



Het Gedenkteken Truus Wijsmuller-Meijer wordt in 1965 onthuld in het sanatorium Beatrixoord in het Oosterpark. In Hoek van Holland herinnert een beeldengroep aan de 10.000 Joodse kinderen die van hieruit ontkwamen naar Engeland. Het is ontworpen door Frank Meisler: één van hen. Sinds 1 juli 2020 staat in het centrum van haar geboorteplaats Alkmaar een standbeeld van Truus Wijsmuller.



Meer informatie

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The Way It Was



Holland's Heroic Wartime Scouts

In World War II, Dutch Scouts defied the German invaders by publishing resistance newspapers, helping Jews escape, and engaging in other acts of sabotage.

By Keith Monroe

BAD DREAMS BOTHERED SOME Scouts and Scouters from western European nations at the 1937 world jamboree in the Netherlands. Their nightmares sprang from rumors about the disappearance of Scouting in Germany, just over the border from the host country.

Germany's Scouts had been the most numerous in Europe. But Scouting in Germany in the 1930s had been overtaken by a rival movement, the Hitler Jugend (Youth). Spawned by the followers of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi party, the group's members got free uniforms, free camping gear, free food and travel—paid for by industrialists in Berlin and Hanover.

At street rallies of his brownshirted Nazis supporters, Adolf Hitler had shouted an ominous message: "In the struggles to come, we will see to it that the youth of Germany belongs to National Socialism only." When the Nazis swept to power in March, 1933, there were already 108,000 Hitler Youth members.

Two months later the Jugend executives and clerks moved into the group's commodious Berlin headquarters near the Reichstag, Germany's parliament building. Boys in trim brown-and-black uniforms, complete with whistle cords and daggers, guarded the door. After another month the government outlawed all non-Nazi youth groups and ordered their members into the Jugend. Some Scout troops kept meeting, however—until the Jugend wrecked their meeting places.

These events didn't make headlines outside Germany. But many European Scouters were among the hundreds of thousands of visitors to Germany in 1936 when Berlin hosted the Olympic Games. A year later, at the world jamboree, they spread sobering accounts of what they had observed. They told of glimpsing 25 big camps at which 14-year-olds flew gliders and sailplanes. A camp director had explained, "This gives them the feel of the air, so they can become Luftwaffe [air force] pilots faster."

One Sunday, they said, roads had been filled with youth marching to Berlin to celebrate the anniversary of the Jugend's swallowing of other youth groups. A tremendous rally was held in the Lustgarten, a huge park bounded by palaces and museums and the River Spree. The square was jammed with thousands on thousands of boys in mustard-color uniforms; teen-agers in brown; smaller boys in black; girls in berets and brown windbreakers. Streets shook with the Nazi hymn, the Horst Wessel song, and the crash of drums and shrilling of bugles. It had been a more massive demonstration than any at the jamboree.

At the jamboree the uneasiest Scouters of all were the Dutch hosts. They knew that Nazis made no secret of their deadly hatred of all Jews. And Holland was home to more Jews (140,000) than any other European country. Most were families who had lived there for generations. Could they be protected if the Nazis came?

After the jamboree, foreboding mounted. In 1938 Hitler annexed Austria and Czechoslovakia without bloodshed; the Jugend took over Scout camps in those countires, and Scout leaders were listed as "suspected criminals."

Then, in September, 1939, the shooting war began when Germany invaded and quickly conquered Poland. Most Polish Scouts joined a secret Home Army. In Holland, a Dutch Nazi movement arose, with its own youth units, the Jengstrom.

More nightmares came true on May 10, 1940, when the Germans invaded Holland. Pieter Koos, a patrol leader in Rotterdam's Troop 6, was one of thousands of Scouts who were plunged into war that bright morning.

At age 68, Koos *(continued on page 54)*



Illustration by John Huehnergarth

Way It Was

still vividly recalls that fateful day. When he heard gunfire he ran home, pulled on his Scout uniform, then ran on. Dutch marines were digging in at a bridge south of the city, where Koos manned a wheelbarrow for four days, carrying food to the firing line and wounded men to the rear.

The German Luftwaffe hit 70 Dutch air bases the first day. Then thousands of air troops leapfrogged deep into Holland by parachute, glider, and seaplane.

But Rotterdam's defenses held. So Hitler ordered Stuka dive bombers to raze the city. "This was beyond description," Pieter Koos wrote. "The heart of Rotterdam was ablaze. All we could do was lend a hand in evacuating hospitals, help the very large number of injured, and carry away the dead."

The Dutch government had no choice but to surrender. But the opposition to the German invaders didn't stop. The same night as the surrender, Scouts were cranking out underground newspapers on toy printing presses. In the dark of the night they slipped them under doors and pasted them across signboards. Eventually 1,200 secret newspapers circulated.

For the first few months a deceptive calm settled over Holland as the Nazis systematically took over.

They required adults to carry several kinds of identification. However, minors didn't need credentials. So Scouts in shabby clothes wandered freely. Asked for directions, they sent soldiers the wrong way. In theaters, they trooped out when Nazi propaganda films began.

They carried messages (oral, never written) for Resistance teams. They watched for chances to snatch weapons that German soldiers carelessly left near barracks windows and accomplished feats of sabotage with nothing more than a match or a screwdriver.

Scouters took mortal risks. A den mother, Truus Wijsmuller, foresaw that Jewish children would soon be in peril. On the day of the surrender, May 14, she learned of a ship in Ijmuiden ready to sail for England. She swiftly rounded up five buses and filled them with 80 Jewish children from an orphanage. En route, Scouts and Cub Scouts hoisted 90 more Jews aboard, to lie flat on roofs or cling to steps. All 170 reached England.

Wim Winkelman, 23-year-old Scoutmaster in Amersfoort, led two burglaries that stole ration cards for fugitive Dutch soldiers. Another Scouter was caught during a third burglary, in which Winkelman didn't participate. The leader had been carrying the names of the whole troop, and to shield the Scouts, Winkelman quickly confessed sole blame for all three raids. As punishment, he was shot.

Today, four Scout troops are named after Scoutmaster Wim Winkelman.

Under German rule, Scout troops met openly for nearly a year, until the Jengstrom tipped off the police. On April 2, 1941, the government proclaimed Scouts to be "terrorists." Mass-arrest teams appeared on the streets, ready with folding tables, portable typewriters, and boxes of handcuffs. They had various troop rosters, but most Scouts were warned and stayed off the streets, aware that the police were too busy to go to their homes. But some boys were caught and held in "preventive custody." Some were never seen again.

During 1942, the authorities ordered all Jewish families to register. Suspecting they'd be sent to labor camps, many hid with friends.

Scoutmaster Joop Westerweel guided many Jews out of the country. His last party included 23 boys, and he asked their pledge to try to go to Palestine. Some did and planted a grove of trees in his name. Westerweel never knew this, however; he died under interrogation.

Jan van Hoof was a 15-year-old Scout at the 1937 world jamboree. Later he worked in the underground for four years. In 1944, the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division landed in Holland and began fighting toward a big bridge across the Waal at Nijmegen. Jan saw the Germans prepare to blow it up, which could block the Allied advance for weeks. Posing as an idle canoeist, he saw explosives in one arch.

No one knows what Jan did. But on September 18, as Allied tanks began crossing, German guards pressed the plunger to destroy the bridge, and nothing happened.

When Jan returned home, he seemed almost indifferent to the fact that a shell had destroyed the family house. "The bridge is safe anyhow, thank God," he said. The next day he died in the fighting.

A few months later Holland was free again. Its Scouts emerged from hiding. There were 116,000, as compared with 36,212 when the war began. Since then, 30 troops have been named for the heroic Jan van Hoof. ■

Dit verhaal is onderdeel van *Scouts in de oorlog*, een verzameling verhalen als eerbetoon aan al die (oud) scouts die zich ingezet hebben voor onze vrijheid en hulp aan de medemens of die slachtoffer werden van oorlogsgeweld, in Nederland en het verre oosten. Met de verhalen willen we inspiratie bieden aan de scouts van nu, in hun wekelijkse activiteiten en als voorbereiding op hun bijdrage aan lokale herdenkingen. Kijk op http://vrijheid.scouting.nl voor meer informatie en alle andere verhalen.