

2 May 2023

Poster exhibition at the "Space to Remember"

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| Welcome | Barbara Hartje
<i>Chairwoman of the Friends of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial</i> |
| Speech | Riet Schuit
<i>Daughter of a Dutch concentration camp prisoner
together with Karin van Steeg</i> |
| Speech | Mykola Titow
<i>Nephew of a Ukrainian concentration camp prisoner</i>
Janina Martynowa
<i>Granddaughter of a Ukrainian concentration camp prisoner</i> |

Riet Schuit and Karin van Steeg

Dear Guests,

Today Riet and I stand here together to tell you about the impact of her father's deportation on her life. As a second-generation war victim, Riet did not experience the war first-hand. She was born shortly after the Netherlands were liberated. And although she grew up without her father, this was by no means an isolated occurrence in Putten. There were many families where the father had been deported and never returned. Yet her story is different from that of many others.

For those of you who are not familiar with the story of the raid that took place in Putten, here briefly are the events that relate to Riet's story.

During the night of 30 September to 1 October 1944, a car belonging to the German Wehrmacht was attacked between Putten and Nijkerk, two villages on the Veluwe forest ridge in the Netherlands. One of the resistance fighters was killed and a German officer was seriously wounded, and although he managed to escape, he died the following morning.

Early the next morning, a large-scale raid began, aimed primarily at men aged between 18 and 50. Under the pretext of having to show their identity papers, they were ordered to report to the church in the centre of Putten. Many men complied with this request as they were unaware of what had occurred the previous night. They assumed they had nothing to fear.

However, things turned out quite differently!

On October 2, 659 of these arrested men were deported from Putten to the Amersfoort camp. The group consisted of inhabitants of Putten and the surrounding villages as well as evacuees and random passers-by. In addition to the target group of men aged 18 to 50, younger and older men were also rounded up.

Nine days later, 601 men from the group of raid victims were sent on the transport to Neuengamme. They could not have had the slightest notion of what the future would hold in store for them. Let alone the fact that many of them would not have much of a future at all. Thirteen men escaped en route by jumping off the train. And so, on 14 October 1944, 588 deportees arrived in Neuengamme during the course of the day. 540 of them perished in the German concentration camps.

That, in a nutshell, is what we can say about the events that followed the attack by the resistance in Putten. And yet many are those who are still affected to this day by the repercussions of the attack and the deportation.

In 1944, an eighteen-year-old woman, Martha van Galen, was living in Putten. She dreamt of a care-free life with a man who would love her dearly. She appeared to have found such a man in Drikus Schipper, whom she had been courting since she had turned 16. No one could have foreseen that this dream would burst like a soap bubble when her beloved Drikus was picked up along with the others and taken away on that fateful day. He was 21 years old at the time.

In the early morning of October 1, a rumour soon began to spread in the village that a raid was underway and that it might be best to hide. Drikus, too, got wind of the raid and hid in Martha's father's woodshed. When her father heard about it, he wanted Drikus gone. He feared his entire family would be lined up against the wall if the Germans discovered that someone had been hiding in the shed. It is not known whether Drikus then went to the church of his own volition or whether he was picked up while looking for another place to hide. No one came to search Martha's father's farmyard. So his hiding place could well have been his salvation had he not been sent away from the woodshed.

Not long after Drikus's deportation, it emerged that Martha was pregnant. At that time, this was something of a disgrace, but a disgrace that could be remedied through marriage as the child would then not grow up "illegitimate".

Since no one knew where Drikus was and whether he was still alive, this option was not available to Martha. Despite the great uncertainty surrounding the fate of her beloved Drikus, she very much desired her unborn child. And so Hendrika (Riet), the baby daughter of Drikus Schipper and Martha van Galen, saw the light of day on 27 May 1945, approximately three weeks after the Netherlands were liberated. At that point, Drikus had been missing for about eight months.

Still nothing was known about his fate and that of many other victims of the raid. People lived in both hope and anxiety. It was not until July 1945 that Drikus Schipper's family was able to place an obituary in the newspaper. He had died already on 11 November 1944, in Ladelund, a mere month after being deported from the Amersfoort camp to Neuengamme.

The name of his "fiancée" Martha van Galen was also mentioned in the obituary. His little daughter Riet was not mentioned. Drikus never found out that she even existed.

The obituary meant clarity, and Martha was now confronted with harsh reality. Drikus would definitely not be returning. He would never get to hold his little daughter in his arms, and she would never know her father. Riet, like many other children in Putten, would grow up without their father. Yet the shame of being "conceived in sin", something that could not be put right through marriage

between two parents, left its mark – and a heavy one at that. Not only on Martha's life, but also and especially on Riet's.

Martha found herself in a very difficult situation. As she now had a child to look after, she was not in a position to provide for her own livelihood. This made her dependent on others, and her dream of a carefree life was further away than ever.

While her father tried to help, he was not able financially to support his daughter and his granddaughter adequately. Drikus's parents, too, did what they could. They traded rye in exchange for a second-hand pram, thereby demonstrating their attachment to Martha and her child, their grandchild.

Making a living for herself was not the only challenge the now 19-year-old Martha had to face. Since marrying the father of her child was no longer possible, the shame she was made to feel by those around her weighed heavily upon her. After all, her child was considered 'unnatural' and should not have existed, a fact she was confronted with on a regular basis.

On one occasion, as Martha was making her way to Drikus's parents with her baby in the pram, she encountered an old farmer. He spat on the ground in front of the pram and said: "It's a wonder the stars haven't fallen out of the sky", making it clear that it was inappropriate to be seen in public with a child that should never have been born. But Martha was not ashamed of her baby and would regularly take her out, even though such remarks must have been very hurtful.

Because she was so dependent on others and her situation was condemned by those around her, she was forced to make decisions that would negatively affect her future and that of her child.

She entered into a relationship with Geurt and married him in October 1946. At the wedding he recognised Riet as his daughter and she took on his surname. Riet was about 18 months old at the time and had never known another father. It soon transpired that Geurt was a pathologically jealous man. Not only did he forbid Martha any contact with Drikus's parents, but he also forbade her from talking about Drikus himself. Within the family, Drikus Schipper became taboo!

Riet was thus deprived of the opportunity to get to know her father from the stories others might tell; in fact, until she was twelve years old, she had no idea of her true parentage. All she knew was that Geurt was her father, even though she felt she had nothing in common with him.

Contact with Drikus's parents was never re-established. They died at a young age. For them, it must have been painful to lose their deceased son's child, too.

Jealousy was not the only issue within Martha and Geurt's family. Geurt was also guilty of verbal and physical abuse. He proved to be irascible, and prone to swearing and shouting, and the punishments he meted out were beyond measure. The marks he left on the whole family were immense. Riet was more often than not the "scapegoat", compared with the other children, who had been born in wedlock. Growing up, Riet did everything she could to gain her father's approval. But it was in vain.

And Martha's early dream of a carefree life with a loving husband did not materialise either. Riet grew up feeling insecure, with a violent father, and also struggled with not being accepted in her immediate surroundings. Geurt's mother would sometimes send for the grandchildren to give them some money. Riet, who didn't know any better than to think that she too was a grandchild, would also come running, but got nothing and was sent away empty-handed, on the grounds that she hadn't been sent for.

Nor could she rely on her teacher's support at school. When a new pupil, a pastor's daughter, went to sit next to Riet on the school bench, she was advised not to do so by the teacher. The teacher explained that it would be better to sit next to another child, for example next to the daughter of a notary or a rich farmer. Riet still remembers how humiliated she felt by this incident. The way Riet was treated must have done incredible damage to the self-perception of this young and innocent child as she was growing up.

At the age of 12, Riet was once again confronted with comments about her origins. Among other things, she was told that she was not Geurt's child, but the child of Drikus Schipper, who had been taken away in the raid. In her confusion, she tried to talk to her mother about it. Martha, in tears, denied it. For Riet, the fact that her mother was crying as she did so was confirmation enough that what she had heard was true.

The combination of not being accepted in her surroundings and being told that Drikus was her father helped her piece the puzzle together: Geurt was not her father! It was not something over which she was likely to grieve.

Riet did not then pursue the matter further as her mother got upset whenever Riet brought up the subject. She did not want to be the cause of her mother's grief. Fortunately, an aunt was able to tell Riet a thing or two about her father. It turned out that Riet was very much like her father.

Later on, when she was long grown up, she got in touch with her father's sister and half-sister. They were able to tell her a lot about him. She remained in contact with them until their deaths.

At last Riet now knew more about her real origins. But the fact that her parents had not yet been married when she was born made Riet long for recognition. Recognition that Drikus Schipper was

in fact her father and that she was – by her very existence – his child and Martha's. It became her personal struggle, one in which she made little progress.

She wrote to organisations asking for information about her father. But she failed to get any response, the authorities perhaps fearing she might derive rights as a result and lay claim to benefits earmarked for children of deported fathers. Occasionally the reply she received would state that she must first prove she was Drikus's daughter.

It was this denial of her *raison d'être*, first and foremost, that would shape her childhood and the rest of her life. Riet only realised how true this was when the book *Van Naam Tot Nummer* came out in 2014. In the book, a piece had been written about each of the victims of the raid. The piece about her father mentioned a 'daughter Riet, born 27-05-1945'. This was the first ever acknowledgement of her existence as the daughter of Drikus Schipper; and, for the first time in seventy years, it made her a 'surviving dependant'.

She herself has expressed this very nicely on her father's poster:

'No 'surviving dependant'.

Never named, never mentioned anywhere.

And then, 70 years later, there it is, in black and white.

From Drikus's relationship with Martha van Galen

a daughter was born on 27 May 1945

I EXIST AND AM ALLOWED TO BE!

Dear Riet, we have gathered here today to tell everyone present that you are the daughter of the deportee Drikus Schipper, born of love and in no way 'unnatural'. We are grateful to you for wanting to share your story, full of painful moments and emotions, and for having the courage to do so.

Hopefully it will add to the recognition you are seeking; after all, you are more than deserving of it.

The poster you are about to hang up has been designed not just for your father, Drikus Schipper, but also for you, his only child!

We thank you very much for your attention and wish you a very special time here at Neuengamme.

Translation / Übersetzung: Stephen Grynwasser

Mykola Titow and Janina Martynowa

Dear prisoners of Neuengamme and their family members!

I deliberately chose this greeting because there are no former prisoners. The tragic events of the past remain alive in our hearts and souls for our entire lives!

I am Mykola Ivanovich Titow – a Ukrainian citizen. And I am a descendant of a Neuengamme prisoner and want to tell my family story. It is short but sad, and unfortunately even today it has not ended for my family the way I would have hoped. For us, the war continues to this day! Once again we have to flee from death, just like 80 years ago, to save our children and grandchildren! The terror has come to us today from a place we would not have believed possible – although there were signs and threats. IT IS HAPPENING AGAIN. The signs came from Russia, and they are no longer just words. Ukraine is directly at the mercy of Russia's attack. BUT WE WILL NOT LET THIS HAPPEN!!! My family was only able to escape the occupation and save their own lives thanks to the prompt support of the employees of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial; their friends, who have asked me not to mention their names, but who are present here today; and the Friends of the Memorial, from whom I sought help. We wish you health and happiness, and we hope for peace for us all.

And now I want to return to the start of my family's story. My uncle, Ivan Ilyich Titow, was deported from Ukraine to Germany in 1942 at the age of 19, together with his younger brother, who was just 16 years old. They were separated when they arrived. The younger brother was sent to a steel mill in the city of Wernigerode, the older wound up in a factory in Leipzig, where he had to perform forced labour under unbearable conditions.

Because he resisted and attempted to escape multiple times, he was first transferred to a local prison and then deported to Buchenwald, and later to Gross-Rosen. After working for half a year in the quarry there, his health deteriorated. He was brought to the Neuengamme main camp and taken from there to the Wittenberge satellite camp. Just one month later, in February 1943, he died. The heart and body of even a healthy young man could not withstand the inhumane conditions! Later on, his ashes – like those of few others who could be identified – were reinterred in the cemetery of honour in the city of Wittenberge, near the city hall.

Thanks to the dedication of the employees of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial, my daughter and I have been able to visit the grave of our loved ones since 2017 and take part in the annual commemoration events at the start of May!

I still do not know the fate of my younger uncle, Mykola Ilyich Titow. According to information from the archive in Bad Arolsen, he died on a death march in April 1945, one day before Wernigerode was liberated by the Allies. I do not know where his grave is, but I continue to search for it.

Now I would like to welcome other family members from Ukraine:

Anatolij Aleksejtschuk, Walentina Kalnaja and Tetjana Martynowa, with their children and grandchildren. I will now hand over to Janina Martynowa.

Hello!

I feel honoured to be here today to talk about my grandfather. Mykola Awerjanowitsch Awdeenko was born in the Kyiv region in 1923. When the war began, my grandfather was not yet 18 years old. Kyiv was quickly occupied, and the young men and women were deported to Germany for forced labour. This is how he wound up in an aircraft factory. He tried to escape twice, and even hit a policeman once. After doing this, he was arrested in 1942 and sent to concentration camps. My grandfather was a prisoner in Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Bergen-Belsen and Neuengamme. He was liberated in 1945.

After the war, he initially served in the army and then returned home. In 1947 he met my grandmother, Anna Pawlowna, in Kyiv, who had also been a forced labourer in Germany. They married and lived together for 63 years. Imprisonment in the concentration camps severely damaged my grandfather's health. He suffered from an open form of tuberculosis and had gastro-intestinal problems. He summed up his memories of his time in the concentration camps with just a few words: "Cold, hunger, prisoner uniforms, terrible conditions".

My grandfather was a very active, diligent and curious person. He very much liked to read and he loved nature. And he was more than a grandfather for me, he was a replacement for my father. He was always friendly, loving and caring. He was also a guest on a memorial trip here in Hamburg once, and he always spoke with great warmth about the employees of the Memorial.

I have so many other memories of him. But I just want to say that I love my grandfather very much, and he will always be in my heart!

Thank you very much for your attention!