

anne frank stichting

August 4, 1944

Dr. Gertjan Broek
Anne Frank House
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From July 6, 1942 until August 4, 1944, during the German occupation of the Netherlands, the rear annex of the canal-side building at 263 Prinsengracht in Amsterdam served as a hiding place for a group of Jews. One of them was Anne Frank. Her father Otto had moved his company to that location at the end of 1940. A handful of his employees helped the people taking refuge there for just over two years, until they were discovered and arrested along with two of their helpers. Of the inhabitants of the Secret Annex, only Otto Frank survived the war.

Eight Jews in hiding behind a movable bookcase. An account known around the world thanks to Anne Frank's diary and the tragic ending – portrayed on stage and filmed: booted Germans determinedly taking the long flight of stairs up to the Secret Annex. A while later, the people in hiding and two helpers carted away in a vehicle. And the telephone call, another well-known part of the story: shortly before the raid an anonymous caller supposedly revealing the whereabouts of the inhabitants of the Secret Annex to the Sicherheitsdienst or SD (German Security Service).

Yet, how accurate is this portrayal? Did the investigators who entered the building actually know there were Jews hiding on the premises?

Another Perspective

The Anne Frank House is interested in telling Anne Frank's story as completely as possible. For this reason, it is also important to closely examine the raid that brought the hiding period to an end.

The question has always been: who betrayed Anne Frank and the others in hiding? This explicit focus on betrayal, however, limits the perspective on the arrest. From this point-of-view other scenarios tend to be overshadowed. In this new study, the Anne Frank house has not focused on the betrayal but on the raid itself: why did this raid take place, based on what information, and from where did this information originate?

With these questions in mind, the arrest has been re-examined using existing sources as well as newly found material. Anne's diary notations from March 1944, not previously used as a reference point, led to police reports and judicial documents from different parts of the Netherlands.

August 4, 1944: The Arrest

Specific documentation from the time of the arrest has unfortunately not been preserved. And much of what was said about the incident was related in hindsight. The failure of memory is immediately apparent: the available statements often contradict each other. Yet, they still offer clues to outline the course of events that day.

Between half past ten and eleven o'clock in the morning a few investigators appeared in front of the building at 263 Prinsengracht and took the stairs to the second-floor offices. There they found a group of employees busy with their daily activities; the four people directly involved with helping those in hiding: Jo Kleiman, Bep Voskuil, Miep Gies, and Victor Kugler. The investigators questioned Kugler, who as acting director of the company was responsible for day-to-day operations, and then searched the building accompanied by him. The others stayed behind in the office.

In 1957, Kugler told a journalist: "The investigators went upstairs to the storeroom in the front part of the building and inquired about what was in all the crates, bags and bales. I had to open everything. I thought to myself, if this is just a search of the premises let it be over soon." Yet going through the building led to the hiding place.

Meanwhile, Bep Voskuil was able to leave the premises without being noticed. Miep Gies' husband Jan arrived as usual around noon and just walked into the office. This suggests that neither the building nor the office were being guarded. His wife informed him about what was going on upstairs and he immediately left.

Jan then decided to inform Kleiman's brother who worked nearby on Bloemgracht. Together they walked to the bridge opposite the building and according to Gies there was now a vehicle standing in front of the door. Some time later the people in hiding, Kleiman, and Kugler were driven away. By



then it was around one o'clock in the afternoon. Meaning the entire operation had lasted more than two hours.

The Investigators

Although the exact number of men who participated in the raid has not been determined with certainty, three are known: Silberbauer, Grootendorst, and Gringhuis. It has always been assumed that hunting down and arresting Jews in hiding was their primary activity, but sources about their work present a different picture.

The Austrian policeman Karl Silberbauer was transferred to Amsterdam in November 1943 to work for the Sicherheitsdienst. By the spring of 1944, he was promoted to the relatively modest paramilitary rank of Hauptscharführer (chief squad leader). Sources from both during and after World War II indicate he was directly involved in eight other cases and that these were specifically related to jewelry, securities, and cash. Only one other situation involved Jews in hiding.

Silberbauer was accompanied by Willem Grootendorst. Grootendorst had been with the Amsterdam police for thirty years before going to work for the Sicherheitsdienst from April 1943 until March 1945. He regularly arrested people, both Jews and non-Jews, who for various reasons had attracted the attention of the Sicherheitsdienst.

The third man, Gezinus Gringhuis, had worked for the Amsterdam police since 1918. From August 1942 until April 1944 he was dispatched to the Bureau Joodse Zaken or BJZ (Lit. Bureau Jewish Affairs) and later the Sicherheitsdienst. The BJZ focused on people in violation of the anti-Jewish regulations, such as those going into hiding. Gringhuis also oversaw the confiscation of furniture when the homes of deported Jews were emptied. From May to November 1944 he worked as an investigator for the Bijzondere Afdeling van de Recherchecentrale (Special Unit of the Central Investigation Division) in The Hague, a nationwide division busy with criminal inquiries. This transfer indicates that at the time of the raid on the Secret Annex he was not employed by the Sicherheitsdienst, so hunting down Jews in hiding was not part of his duties.

Suspicious

Letters written by Otto Frank in November 1945 show that he was convinced they had been betrayed. He looked through mug shots with his helpers to identify the men involved in arresting them, "durch diese Leute vielleicht weiter zu hören, wer uns verraten hat (through those people to possibly hear who betrayed us). From the photos, they recognized Gringhuis and Grootendorst.

In 1946, Frank and his helpers expressed their suspicions against Willem van Maaren, who had begun working in the company warehouse in March 1943. His predecessor Johan Voskuil knew about the people in hiding and had made the famed bookcase, but due to a serious illness had to stop working. With this, the warehouse lost a trustworthy figure on the floor. Van Maaren, who was not taken into confidence, was by definition a risk and there were doubts about whether he was reliable enough to work for the company. Anne, who only heard about him from hearsay, wrote negatively about him in her diary.

In the first years after World War II, the allegations against Van Maaren were examined by two different law enforcement agencies. Due to lack of evidence, a Dutch district court judge rejected the charges.

In 1963, the Austrian Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal tracked down Silberbauer. With this, the wartime arrest of Anne Frank – now famous because of her diary – received worldwide attention. Van Maaren's name also appeared in the press, although his direct involvement was still not clear. According to the Dutch newspaper De Telegraaf of November 22, 1963, Otto Frank said about Van Maaren: "We suspected him all along and reported him to the postwar authority investigating people accused of collaborating with the Nazi occupier. While, on the very same day, the then Utrechtsch Nieuwsblad quoted Frank as saying: "I never took any actions against the warehouse worker. I do not know the man and I have no evidence against him."

The Rijksrecherche (National Department of Criminal Investigation) got involved in the case and questioned not only people like Van Maaren and Silberbauer, but also the former chief of the Sicherheitsdienst, Willy Lages. This produced no new evidence and the case against Van Maaren was not reopened. Nonetheless, since that time, his name has always been linked to "the betrayal of Anne Frank."



Van Maaren was the only suspect indicated by those directly involved and as such he was questioned by the police and judiciary. As time passed, different people suggested other suspects as well. Anne Frank's biographer Melissa Müller pointed to the possible involvement of Lena Hartog – the wife of another warehouseman – as the betrayer. Otto Frank's biographer Carol Ann Lee posed the theory that the Dutch National Socialist Tonny Ahlers was the betrayer. In the 2003 publication *Who betrayed Anne Frank?* authors David Barnouw and Gerrold van der Stroom of the NIOD (The Netherlands Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies) established that the theories related to Van Maaren, Hartog, and Ahlers do not stand up to scrutiny.

More theories followed. Dutch journalist Sytze van der Zee pointed to Ans van Dijk, who was executed in 1948 for betraying Jews, as the person responsible. A book about the helper Bep Voskuijl, published by her son Joop van Wijk and co-authored by Jeroen de Bruyn, suggests the involvement of Bep's sister Nelly due to her contact with German soldiers.

The Anne Frank House's current investigation into the abovementioned suspects has not provided convincing evidence to support any of these theories.

Other Insights

Anne Frank's diary did provide an interesting new clue. Beginning on March 10, 1944 she repeatedly wrote about the arrest of two men who dealt in illegal ration cards. She calls them "B" and "D", referring to the salesmen Martin Brouwer and Pieter Daatzelaar who represented Gies & Co. This firm – affiliated with Otto Frank's company Opekta and located in the same building – traded in raw materials for the food industry. Anne mentions the impact of their arrests on March 14: "B. and D. have been caught, so we have no coupons . . ." This clearly indicates that the people in hiding got at least part of their ration coupons from these salesmen.

Police Reports from Zwolle and Haarlem, the hometowns of the two men, indicate that Anne was rather well-informed. The notations Anne and the reporting officers made independent of each other reveal striking similarities. After two weeks in custody, the two men were released at four o'clock in the afternoon on March 22. The next day Anne wrote in her diary: "B. & D. have been let out of prison." This illustrates how closely the inhabitants of the Secret Annex followed these developments.

Arrests like these were reported to the aforementioned Special Unit of the Central Investigation Division in The Hague, established in 1941 to act against illegal distribution of ration coupons and meat. During their day-to-day activities, investigators from this department often came across Jews in hiding by chance. And though the investigators officially worked for this Dutch unit, they were supervised by men from the German Sicherheitsdienst.

The salesmen were prosecuted by the Dutch judiciary in their hometowns in the summer of 1944. In August, a heavy fine was imposed on Brouwer. It is worth noting that at the end of July the court in Haarlem dismissed the charges against Daatzelaar. Available sources do not reveal what motivated this decision. There is also no information about statements he made or the role his sympathies for the Dutch National Socialist Party (NSB) might have played in his case. Anne mentioned him in her diary as one of the people they needed to be quiet for in the Secret Annex, which indicates, as far as she knew, that he was unaware of the people hiding upstairs in the building.

Incongruities

Compared to an "ordinary" case of betrayal of Jews in hiding this account contains a number of striking aspects. Such as the telephone call to the Sicherheitsdienst. Over the course of 1944, many telephone lines were cut off, limiting the ability of individuals to make calls. Another interesting fact is that the telephone numbers of the Sicherheitsdienst, unlike those of the BJZ, were not in the phone book in 1944. This creates a real possibility that the call, if it actually took place, came from another government agency.

Until now the assumption related to this matter has always been that the SD men were specifically looking for Jews in hiding, and therefore the raid on Prinsengracht was clearly a case of betrayal. And because the investigator Gringhuis had worked for both the Sicherheitsdienst and BJZ, his presence at the raid has always been considered perfectly logical. But as this new investigation reveals, Gringhuis no longer worked for these organizations. He worked for the



aforementioned Special Unit, where his responsibilities did not include hunting down Jews, but investigating economic violations.

In addition, more than two hours elapsed between the arrival and departure of the authorities, longer than necessary for rounding up betrayed Jews in hiding. It is not known with certainty if the vehicle for those arrested was already parked outside the building, but it is doubtful because Jan Gies would probably have avoided going inside. Also he and Bep Voskuijl left the premises without any difficulties. If the authorities came specifically to arrest the people in hiding it seems unlikely they would have let anyone get away.

Kugler wrote to the PRA in September 1945 that he and Kleiman were also arrested for different reasons. The administration of the Amersfoort internment camp, where they were both sent after the arrest, confirms this. Kugler was imprisoned for *Judenbegünstigung* (Lit. Jew Favoring) and Kleiman for *Arbeitsverweigerung* (Lit. Work Refusal). According to Kugler, the issue was "letting people work clandestinely to keep them from being called up as forced labor and sent to Germany."

A company where people were working illegally and two sales representatives were arrested for dealing in ration coupons obviously ran the risk of attracting the attention of the authorities. While searching for people in hiding, fraud with ration coupons could be detected since they were often dependent on clandestine help. Conversely, investigating this kind of fraud might very well lead to the discovery of people in hiding.

Future Research

Despite decades of research, betrayal as a point of departure has never resulted in anything conclusive. The Anne Frank House has therefore broadened the perspective and developed new lines of reasoning. This approach might also provide more insights about the lives of people in hiding during the war. In any case, the Anne Frank House's investigative report indicates that more was going on in the building than only people being hidden there. So perhaps the authorities raided 263 Prinsengracht for other reasons.

The possibility of betrayal has of course not been entirely ruled out by this, nor has any relationship between the ration coupon fraud and the arrest been proven. Further research into the day-to-day activities at Otto Frank's company and what else was happening in and around the premises could potentially provide more information. This article is a first step in thinking more broadly about the raid on the Secret Annex. Hopefully it will also inspire other researchers to pursue new leads. Clearly, the last word about that fateful summer day in 1944 has not yet been said.

www.annefrank.org/arrest

Translated from the Dutch by Lorraine T. Miller / Epicycles, Amsterdam

