

Not Following Orders

Dutch Policeman Honored as Righteous Among the Nations

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We are now more than six decades removed from the Holocaust. What is left to write about?

Following the opening of archives in the former Communist bloc, it is clear that there is still much to be written about specific communities and individuals. Some important topics that cut across the subject are now being researched, like children or women in the Holocaust, collaboration in various countries under Nazi occupation, and of course issues

Every generation asks different questions about history

concerning looted Jewish property. We are still waiting for monographs on many ghettos and camps, as well as a comprehensive study of the last chapter of the Holocaust, the death marches.

Why was it important to make the Library catalogue available online?

With over 115,000 titles in 54 languages, no single person could read every page in the Yad Vashem Library collection. It would take weeks just to handle each book and flip through it cursorily.

The cataloguing of the Library's holdings, which began over half a century ago and continues today, provides schematic information about its publications, allowing interested readers to decide which books to peruse. In short, the Library catalogue is a portal to the largest collection of knowledge and wisdom about the Holocaust. While copyright laws and conventions of fair usage make it difficult to post whole scholarly articles and books on the Internet, making the Yad Vashem Library catalogue available online provides an irreplaceable source of knowledge about the published works of others, and helps people everywhere gain access to it.

■ During WWII, police forces all over Europe participated in the roundups and deportation of Jews to their death. The participation of local police and other agencies was crucial to Nazi Germany's ability to implement the Final Solution. Most policemen performed their jobs, never stopping to reflect on the significance of their task; others may have sympathized with the people they were tearing from their homes, but felt there was nothing they could do about it; some went and warned Jews of their impending arrest. We know only of a couple of very rare cases of open resistance to these horrific orders.

On 9 March 1943, the military police (*Marechaussee*) in Grootegast/Grijpskerk, Holland received the order to arrest the remaining Jews of the area and bring them to the Groningen railway station. At first, the policemen tried to argue with their superiors, but their commanders insisted and went on to use different ways to pressure their subordinates to comply with the order. When a motivational speech failed, the commanders tried to convince each of them separately, and finally threatened them with incarceration. But the policemen stood firm. Finally they were taken to the Vught concentration camp. In 1988, all but one were recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations.

Henk Drogdt's name was missing from the list submitted to the Commission for the Designation of the Righteous, because he had managed to escape arrest. It took another twenty years and the unexpected help of El Al pilot Mark Bergman to complete the picture. The stories he heard from Drogdt's son, Henk Brink (Drogdt), whom he met on one of his flights to South Africa, prompted Bergman to turn to Yad Vashem. Thanks to the Department of the Righteous' painstaking efforts and searches in various archives, the picture could be pieced together.

Thus it was learned that following his escape, Henk Drogdt joined one of the Dutch resistance groups. He was caught in the beginning of August 1943 and executed on 14 April 1944. The entry in the death book of the Oranjehotel prison in Scheveningen dryly states: "Policeman, refused to arrest Jews."



■ Dutch policeman Henk Drogdt, photographed during WWII



■ Henk Brink (left) receives the certificate and medal honoring his late father Henk Drogdt as a Righteous Among the Nations from Justice Jacob Turkel (right).

Henk Drogdt was 23 years old when he and his friends were ordered to arrest the Jews. He had the promise of a good future, and was planning to marry his girlfriend who was expecting a child—a son he did not live to see. Yet when faced with a moral dilemma, he was willing to sacrifice everything rather than participate in the murder of Jews who were probably total strangers to him. Sixty-four years after his death, his son came to Jerusalem and received the Righteous Among the Nations award on his father's behalf from Chairman of the Commission for the Delegation of the Righteous, retired Supreme Court Justice Jacob Turkel. Also present were IDF military police, honoring the memory of the Dutch army policeman who had shown such bravery by refusing to follow orders.

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