

Biography, Edmond Houtappel, Wolfstraat 8

Born in 1901 and murdered in Neuengamme on 24 November 1944.

Edmond Houtappel was trained as a wine merchant in Bordeaux. He originally lived in the Franciscus Romanusweg, but when the Nazis requisitioned the house, he moved in to the family's vacant wholesale business premises in the Wolfstraat and worked there. The two adjacent buildings, numbers 6 en 8, the homes of Giel Ummels the butcher and Edmond Houtappel, became the location for much resistance work.

On 10 May 1944 Edmond Houtappel was arrested in Maastricht. Edmond and his neighbour, the butcher J.W. (Giel) Ummels, were betrayed just a few months before liberation. The two men, who were arrested together with Mrs Ummels, had been helping people who were in hiding and British pilots.

Edmond was a reserve captain in the Dutch army and was put in charge of the border detachment of the 13th Infantry Regiment in Wahlwiller from 1938-1940. An officer in heart and soul, he was a born optimist, with an indestructible conviction that the Germans would be defeated. His military function allowed him to take photos of the German positions in the Siegfried line for the Belgian secret service, among other things. Via his brother-in-law Louis Evrard Hustinx, Belgian consul in Maastricht, this information was passed on to Brussels.

After the surrender of the Dutch army on 15 May 1940, Houtappel joined the resistance. He was director of a wine merchants and he ran the 'Fa. Wed. R. W. Hustinx, Koffiebranderij, groothandel in koloniale waren' (*coffee roasting company and wholesaler in colonial products*) at Wolfstraat 8 in the centre of Maastricht. Edmond Houtappel played an active part in the Maastricht District of the L.O. (National Organisation for assistance to people in hiding), an

organisation with which he came into contact through his neighbour Giel Ummels.

For his part, Ummels was already involved in the resistance, introduced into it by curate Joosten of the Onze Lieve Vrouwe church. His butchers shop was a good hiding place for British pilots, Jewish families and young men who wanted to avoid conscription to work in Germany. The shop was always busy, so the fact that many strangers came and went was not obvious. Farmers from the area provided food, and as Ummels was a butcher, there was always enough to eat. If anyone had to move to a new address, they could use the passage through to Edmond Houtappel's adjoining house that had been made in the cellars.

And if any of the men had to go to another hiding place in the city, then he would go hand in hand with Ummels' young daughter; in this way they would pass for father and daughter.

In the spring of 1944, the L.O. in Maastricht was reorganised, and as a result went through a period of tumultuous growth. The number of people in hiding grew from a few hundred to more than a thousand. Help was offered to Jewish people who had gone into hiding, and the support funds grew to more than f 20.000,-- per month. There was even a special fund to buy prisoners their freedom.

M.J. Hooghuis, a textile worker, had already helped L.O. worker Ummels. At the beginning of 1944 Hooghuis got to know the 25-year old Mrs A.E. Zeguers-Boere. She had an unhappy marriage and had been left behind with her three small children after her husband was taken to Germany as a prisoner of war in 1940.

In her large house on the Van Heylerhoflaan she organised parties for German soldiers and prostitutes but this soon got out of hand. In December 1941 she moved to the Sint Servaesklooster where she expanded her lucrative brothel. This contact with the occupiers provided her with a perfect cover for black market and smuggling activities. However, in 1942 she was arrested for this and was imprisoned for two months.

During this time she met Ströbel, the infamous chief of the Sicherheitspolizei (*Security Police*) in Maastricht, with whom she immediately started a relationship. Resistance worker Hooghuis was aware of this, but was not sensible enough to see any danger in it. When Hooghuis found out that Dolmans, an L.O. worker, had been arrested by the Germans, he tried to buy Dolmans' release via Zeguers. Zeguers passed on the message to the Sicherheitspolizei (SiPo) but also mentioned that she was in contact with the illegal services through Hooghuis and Ummels the butcher. The SiPo played along with the game.

Ummels' house in de Wolfstraat was watched and the L.O. was informed by Zeguers that the prisoner's freedom could be bought.

The Germans released the prisoners and led the L.O. leadership in Maastricht to believe that it might be possible to buy the freedom of even more prisoners. Meanwhile Zeguers had gained the trust of the L.O. and regularly attended L.O. meetings in the Wolfstraat. The Sicherheitspolizei penetrated deeper and deeper into the network of the L.O in Maastricht. The main focus was Ummels' butchers shop.

When the L.O. gave notice that they were prepared to pay 12,000 guilders to free a new prisoner, the SiPo realised that they had caught a big fish. Zeguers continued to pass on the names of people involved in illegal activities to the SiPo. After two unsuccessful attempts at the end of March and the beginning of April, fifty illegal workers, including Edmond Houtappel, were arrested in the city on 9 and 10 May. Also among these was one person who Zeguers had been hiding in her house so that the L.O would continue to trust her.

As a result of this betrayal by Zeguers a large number of Maastricht resistance workers were caught by the Sicherheitspolizei. Most of those arrested were later freed, including Maria Houtappel-Hustinx and Ummels the butcher's wife (who promptly went into hiding with her two daughters). However, six of them, including Edmond Houtappel, did not survive imprisonment. Edmond died on 24

November 1944 in Neuengamme and Ummels the butcher died on 2 December 1944 in Sachsenhausen.

After the arrests, Zeguers went on holiday with SS-er Ströbel and then continued her life in Maastricht. Giel Ummels passed on the information via a prison warder that she had probably been responsible for the betrayal.

(Fred Cammaert, *Het verborgen front. Een geschiedenis van de georganiseerde illegaliteit in de provincie Limburg tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (*The hidden front. A history of organised illegality in the province of Limburg during the Second World War*)

(Leeuwarden/Mechelen, 1994) pages 639-654.) The dissertation can be downloaded as pdf: <http://irs.ub.rug.nl/ppn/123909783>