

DERK VAN ASSEN (1891 - 1943) and his wife BERENDINA (BERENDJE) VAN ASSEN - GROLLEMAN (1894 – 1945.)

Derk van Assen (1891) was an eminent man in Maastricht and president of the Christian Union of Tax Officials.

Derk was active in the underground resistance from the beginning of the war, at first without being part of an organised group: later he became a member of the Versleyen group, a group of tax officials within the L.O (National Organisation for help to those in hiding); he was also a member of the Trouw group, the national Christian resistance group. Derk had excellent contacts in Maastricht, where he worked closely with the Catholic resistance group led by L.J. Roumen and with the Protestant resistance group led by A.H. van Mansum.

Derk was motivated by Christian principles and by patriotism. He was a humanist who considered that all men were equal and he was prepared to risk everything to save the lives of Jews and others.

He contributed to the production of illegal publications and to organising national information networks. He also provided space at his home where professional document forgers could work.

Derk and Berendje were friends with Isidore and Frederika Schaap, who had moved to Maastricht in 1939. The Schaaps were Jewish, but had thoroughly integrated; they sometimes went with Derk and Berendje to the Reformed Church on Sunday mornings.

In the summer of 1942 the Schaaps were called up to report for deportation; Derk helped them to find a hiding place. They spent the first nights with a family that ran an opticians shop in Maastricht. Meanwhile they altered their identity cards and the J (for Jew) was removed, so that travelling was less risky. During these two days the

couple was able to fetch a few of their belongings from their cellar and to store them at the house of their neighbours, the Roushops. The next day Mr & Mrs Schaap took the train to Utrecht where they were looked after by Mrs Rinkking, the wife of one of Derk's cousins. However, they quickly moved on to the De Vries family in Hillegom. (Mrs De Vries was Berendje's sister.) Then they moved to the Van Burens in Amsterdam, where they were later caught, and transferred to Auschwitz where they were murdered. Mr Van Buren was also arrested and was murdered in a concentration camp.

On 26 July 1943 Derk was arrested in Maastricht after having been shadowed for some time by the SD (Sicherheitsdienst). The SD had persuaded "Blond Mien", a resistance worker, to work for them. She was to gain information about Derk's contacts, but before she could do so, Derk had been picked up and thrown into prison. Derk was interrogated for seven weeks by Oberscharführer Richard Nitsch. Meanwhile Derk's colleagues had hatched a plan to help Derk escape, but the Germans discovered it. In the attempt to stop him escaping, Nitsch and two other officers executed Derk on 13 September 1943 in Horst, Noord – Limburg.

In the meantime, Berendje was also arrested and imprisoned, first in Maastricht, then in Haaren and finally in Vught. From there she was deported to Camp Ravensbruck in Germany where she died on 2 February 1945.

After the war Derk and Berendje were decorated by the Air Chief Marshall and Vice Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces for "assistance to officers of the marine, land and air forces to escape from imprisonment, or to avoid being taken prisoner by the enemy".

On 6 September 1989 Derk van Assen and Berendina van Assen – Grolleman were awarded the honorary title of Righteous among the Nations by Yad Vashem.