



'Seducing and Killing Nazis' challenges us to resist, not adapt to, fascism

By Chauncey K. Robinson

The book *Seducing and Killing Nazis* is essential reading because there's nothing "normal" about Nazis. From past to present, they are a group of people who support the genocide of others based on hate and the idea of "white pride." There's nothing "normal" about fascist regimes; they stamp out democracy and encourage suppression.

Yet, in these times, allies and representatives of these ideas are being glamorized on pop culture reality shows like [Dancing with the Stars](#), or given sympathetic profile pieces in mainstream news publications like the [New York Times](#). Author Sophie Poldermans's highlight of three women who dared to fight back against fascism in World War II is a bold challenge to resist instead of adapting to—and normalizing—hatred.

Seducing and Killing Nazis—Hannie, Truus, and Freddie: Dutch Resistance Heroines of WWII is a non-fiction book that details the journey of three teenaged girls who faced the question: "Do we adapt or resist?" Freddie Oversteegen, Truus Oversteegen, and Hannie Schaft, while living in

the Dutch city of Haarlem, made the decision to take up arms against Nazi Germany. The book details their lives before the Nazi occupation of their hometown, their lives during the war, and the political and emotional aftermath once the war ended. The book not only serves as a historical report that goes beyond dates and figures but puts into context those events and their impact on society today.

When the last of the three women, Freddie, passed away in 2018, there was a media storm surrounding her life. The headline of Freddie's obituary in *The Washington Post* read "Freddie Oversteegen, Dutch Resistance fighter who killed Nazis, through seduction, dies at 92." Of course, the article received a great deal of attention, especially now that the discussion on neo-Nazism and white nationalism have entered mainstream discourse. Yet, what articles like those failed to do was dig into the political layers of the resistance movement the women were part of and the post-war significance of their fight. Poldermans's book fills in those gaps and expands on these ideas.

The author makes it clear in her prologue and preface that this is a book with a purpose. Poldermans, who knew Freddie and Truus personally, lifts up the lesser known aspects of Holocaust and WWII history around the perspective of female heroines, specifically in the Netherlands. This book has been a long time coming for Poldermans, who explains that from an early age she admired the ideals of the three women. She notes in the opening that the world is still dominated by men, and war often portrays women as the main victims, while it is “precisely women who resist under such circumstances and show genuine leadership.”

Poldermans wants the world to know about Freddie, Truus, and Hannie, to display that women like these existed and that it is their kind of conviction that may be what the world needs today. By interweaving her own personal story and inspiration into the introduction, Poldermans challenges the reader not to be a passive consumer of the story but an active student of the lessons her book can provide.

The book goes in chronological order of the lives of the women. In the 1940s, Hannie, Truus, and Freddie were teenagers of 19, 16, and 14. Poldermans details briefly their lives and backgrounds before the war. This description serves as a way to bring out the sharp contrast to their existence once the Nazis occupied Haarlem. Since none of the three young women was Jewish, it is emphasized in the book that they could have attempted to live their lives as “normal,” but that none of them believed that was an option when such injustice surrounded them.

Poldermans makes a point of describing the resistance work Hannie, Truus, and Freddie did before joining the Dutch resistance movement. Hannie organized protests on her college campus and belonged to a student group that opposed Nazism. The mother of Truus and Freddie, Trijntje van der Molen, was a Communist who was socially involved in sheltering Jewish people during the Nazi regime. By providing these kinds of details, the book exposes the roots of the heroines’ convictions.

Once they officially joined the resistance, all three participated in transporting illegal newspapers and weapons and stealing identity cards for Jewish people and others in the resistance. They provided Jewish children with safe houses and gathered important intelligence. They carried out sabotage as some of the only women in the armed resistance. They seduced high-ranking Nazi officers, lured them into the woods, and “liquidated (killed)” them. In the midst of all of this, as Poldermans explains, they tried to remain “human under inhuman circumstances.”

Another interesting aspect is the author’s description of the underground resistance movement. Poldermans does not shy away from detailing the fact that the group the young women belonged to, the Council of Resistance (RVV) of Haarlem, had Communist origins. The RVV originated from the *Waarheid* (“Truth”) group, a Communist resistance magazine. This group, along with others, was part of an armed resistance against the Nazis and those they deemed traitors who provided information to the regime.

This background regarding the girls’ political affiliations would have great significance later on as they sought recognition and support after the war. This brings about another unique aspect of the book. Poldermans doesn’t stop at the end of WWII but explores the aftermath of it.

History can often be gutted of its interesting details in order to paint a less vivid picture for fear, by those in power, of the messaging it might send. Hannie, Truus, and Freddie are seen universally as heroes now, but it would take decades after the war for them to get proper recognition from the government. They, like many of those they fought alongside, would be the victims of redbaiting and anti-communist discrimination when seeking the support and honor their courage deserved.

When we learn about this time in history now, words such as “resistance fighters” or “partisans” are often used with little concrete context.

Mainstream media almost never mention the role underground communist parties played in organizing these groups and efforts. Their involvement was not only the case in the Netherlands, but in France, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, Greece, Yugoslavia, and others, including even inside the fascist countries of Germany and Italy. In many of those places, especially if they turned socialist after the war or included left parties in coalition governments, the sacrifices made by resistance fighters did not go unrecognized.

It's a welcome change to read a book that chooses to explore all the facets and nuances of history instead of picking out what would read as the most universally, but minimally acceptable. Poldermans not only does this concerning the politics but the emotional turmoil as well.

War isn't pretty. People die and many are forever changed. The book doesn't glorify the acts the women had to carry out. It touches upon the post-traumatic stress Truus and Freddie suffered for years after. It details the depression that Hannie fell into before she was killed by the Nazi regime. These women are shown as heroes, with the emotional scars to prove it. Poldermans

beautifully drives home one of the central themes of her book, which is the fight to remain human under inhuman circumstances.

Seducing and Killing Nazis is a fascinating dive into a part of our history that we can continue to learn from today. These women could have lived their lives as "normal" because they weren't initially directly affected, but they recognized then that there was nothing normal about the situation. They saw Nazism and its goals as the enemies of freedom and humanity's progress.

These three young women left no room for compromise.

In a world where some may try to present the dangers of white supremacy and [fascism](#) as everyday status-quo politics, a book like this needs to exist, so we can remember—and refuse to adapt. In the words of Truus's published book, which Poldermans references, *Not Then, Not Now, Not Ever*.

Seducing and Killing Nazis (SWW Press) is available via [Amazon](#) and wherever books are sold.

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