

## HISTORY

# The teenage girls who flirted with Nazis, then lured them to their deaths

Three brave women risked their lives to fight fascism, author Sophie Poldermans tells **Maya Oppenheim**

Red lipstick and shiny eye shadow were unlikely but important weapons deployed by members of the Dutch resistance when taking on Nazi soldiers.

Freddie and Truus Oversteegen, two sisters, and their best friend Hannie Schaft would put on their best clothes and fastidiously apply their make-up before going into bars to seek out unsuspecting targets.

The young girls, who were active in the Dutch resistance during the Second World War, would then strike up conversations with Nazi soldiers or Dutch collaborators.

They would giggle and bat their eyelashes as they cajoled them into disclosing classified information. Then they would lure them into the woods on the pretext of a "romantic walk" – and shoot them dead.

Freddie and Truus survived the war but Hannie, who is far more famous than the Oversteegen sisters, was caught and executed by the Nazis just three weeks before the war came to an end. The last words she uttered are said to have been "I'm a better shot" after one of her executioners wounded her with the first attempt.

Sophie Poldermans was a close friend of Freddie and Truus, who both recently died at the age of 92, and regularly spoke to them about their memories of the war throughout their lives.

Poldermans, a lawyer who specialises in women and war crimes, has now written about their harrowing experiences in a book titled *Seducing and Killing Nazis – Hannie, Truus, and Freddie: Dutch Resistance Heroines of WWII*.

"They were extremely brave women," she says. "I would not want to have stood in their shoes. They started out small in the resistance – carrying illegal newspapers printed by the resistance news about Nazi troops.

"They would ride their bicycles and deliver them to specific addresses. They would also steal false identification papers for Jewish people in hiding."

Freddie and Truus, who was two years older than her, were born and raised in Haarlem, a Dutch city close to Amsterdam, by a single

mother. The parents had divorced and their mother was a communist. She would get the young girls to make dolls for children who were victims of the Spanish Civil War.

Poldermans, who worked with the siblings for more than a decade as a board member of the National Hannie Schaft Foundation but also knew them personally, says Truus and Hannie would help transport Jewish children to safe houses but Freddie, 14 at the beginning of the war, had been too young to help.

"People also could have easily thought she was a Jewish child herself because of her appearance so it would have been too dangerous for her," says Poldermans. "But Truus and Hannie would take Jewish children from one safe house to another on their bikes if they knew there were traitors around. It was not suspicious for them to be carrying young children because they were women. They would sing songs to distract the children."

But the three girls' roles and tactics in the resistance grew increasingly dangerous as they got more heavily involved. "They would use explosives to blow up railway lines and trains to make sure Germans were not able to transport soldiers or weapons or Jewish people," Poldermans explains. "This was a heavier type of resistance. They wanted

**They did what they did because it had to be done. They did not believe there was another way**



**Hannie Schaft and her friends helped to transport Jewish children to safe houses** NORTH HOLLAND ARCHIVES



**Truus Oversteegen 'believed in justice', according to her friend Sophie Poldermans** NORTH HOLLAND ARCHIVES

to make sure it was chaos on the railway." It was not long before the teenage girls started seducing and shooting Nazis – with commanders assigning them particular targets.

"These are the only three women we know of who seduced and killed Nazis in the Netherlands," Poldermans says. "That is what makes it such a unique story."

"They were teenagers and they were young and pretty. They would dress up very nicely and wear heavy make-up. They would pretend to be "kraut girls", who were local women who had relationships with German officers, Dutch traders and general members of the Nazi party. Of course, their main target was the high-ranking officers."

She adds: "They would go into bars and then they would flirt with these soldiers and giggle and smile and be girly girls. They would say: 'We can go for a romantic walk in the forest'. They would lure these guys into the woods to try to extract all the information they needed and then they would shoot them right there on the spot. Freddie was about 16. Truus was 18 and Hannie was 21. They started in the summer of 1943 and carried on until the end of the war."

Truus was a real tomboy who had never worn make-up before, whereas Hannie always powdered her face right before an assignment in order to "die beautifully" if she was captured by the Nazis.

Poldermans, who notes the girls never slept with the Nazis, said they would have to relocate if their profile started to become known in the area to ensure they were not recognised. The girls kept their actions a secret from everyone

– even friends and family – for security purposes.

The sisters always refused to reveal how many Nazis they had killed when asked about it after the war – with Freddie telling Poldermans: "One should not ask a soldier any of that."

"They did what they did because it had to be done," Poldermans says. "They believed in justice. They did not believe there was another way. At the same time, they tried to remain human. They suffered from depression and had nightmares and what we would now call PTSD."

The lecturer says it took a long time after the end of the war before the sisters got the recognition they deserved – explaining many people wanted to look forwards rather than backwards, and stories of the resistance were dominated by men.

Poldermans adds: "They had to fight for recognition. Truus was very outspoken. She would always tell her story but Freddie was very traumatised. She couldn't talk about the war and it was only in the last few years of her life that she could. Freddie got all the recognition for her work after she died. It is too bad she doesn't know."

"War affected everything in their lives. Truus became a well-known sculptor but the war was present in all of her artwork."

"The trauma never went away for them. Every day around liberation day in May, they would wake up screaming, having nightmares about the war. All the memories came back to them. It was so bad that Freddie would have to leave the country for a couple of months during that time of year." THE INDEPENDENT

## News in brief

## JAPAN

## One in 10 companies specify heel height

More than one in 10 companies in Japan have formal regulations about the height of heeled shoes that female workers are forced to wear, research suggests.

And 8 per cent of employees said they worked at firms where it was compulsory for female staff to wear make-up, a survey by the Japanese Trade Union Confederation found.

More than 31,000 people have signed a petition calling for the requirement to wear heels in offices to be banned.

The hashtag #KuToo – echoing the #MeToo movement against sexual assault and harassment – has been widely disseminated on social media. The phrase is a play on the Japanese words for shoes – *kutsu* – and pain – *kutsuu*.

## CULTURE

## Wilde's stolen ring returns to Oxford

A gold ring given by Oscar Wilde to a friend will be returned to Oxford University next month – nearly 20 years after it was stolen.

Arthur Brand, a Dutch art detective, recovered the ring and will hand it back to Magdalen College, where the Irish author studied. The 18-carat friendship band was jointly given by Wilde (right) and a fellow student Reginald Harding to William Ward in 1876.

It was stolen in 2002 by a cleaner, Eamonn Andrews, who sold it for £150. Its whereabouts have since been a mystery, but it was widely believed to have been melted down. It was worth roughly £35,000 at the time. The ring bears Wilde's initials and a Greek inscription that says: "Gift of love, to one who wishes love".

## SCIENCE

## Hibernation 'would aid space travel'

Putting astronauts into a state of suspended animation could make it easier to reach other planets.

Researchers at the European Space Agency examined how hibernation would affect the design of a crewed mission to Mars and concluded that it could help to reduce the size of spacecraft. While slowing humans' metabolic rate in a similar way to how animals hibernate is not yet possible, the team's leader, Jennifer Ngo-Anh, said similar methods are already used to save trauma victims.

Challenges include designing the spacecraft to operate autonomously while the crew sleep through much of the 180-day trip to Mars. AP

## UNITED STATES

# Chemistry professors 'copied Breaking Bad to set up meth lab'

By Johnny Diaz

Two chemistry professors have been accused of producing methamphetamine in a case that brings to mind the award-winning crime drama *Breaking Bad*.

Terry Bateman, 45, and Bradley Rowland, 40 were charged with manufacturing the drug, known as crystal meth, and using drugs paraphernalia in the US state of Arkansas. Meth is highly addictive and can be manufactured illegally with chemicals.

Mr Bateman and Mr Rowland are associate professors of chemistry at Henderson State University, a liberal arts college of about 3,500 students in the city of Arkadelphia.

They were placed on administrative leave last month after the uni-

versity's Reynolds Science Centre had to closed on 8 October following "a report of an undetermined chemical odour", according to a university spokeswoman, Tina Hall.

She said that tests revealed an elevated presence of benzyl chloride in a lab. Benzyl chloride is used to produce certain dyes and pharmaceutical products, according to the US Environmental Protection Agency.

Short-term effects from inhaling it include irritation of the skin, eyes and upper respiratory tract.

"Benzyl chloride is an inexpensive and versatile chemical that is used to make many other useful drugs and molecules," said Eric Simanek, a professor of chemistry at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth.

Ms Hall said that Henderson State University's on-call environmental services company had conducted remediation work in the building, which reopened on 29 October.

The arrests called to mind the popular AMC series *Breaking Bad*, which ran from 2008 to 2015.

THE INDEPENDENT

**i** In *Breaking Bad*, school chemistry teacher Walter White, played by Bryan Cranston, becomes a drug lord when he cannot afford his cancer treatment.



## Golden road

A car drives through the autumn colours of a forest at Pattensen, near the central German city of Hannover yesterday AP

## HEALTH

# Soup may help to fight scourge of malaria

By Jemma Crew

The answer to tackling the world-wide scourge of malaria could lie in a humble bowl of soup, scientists say.

British scientists have shown some traditional vegetable and meat broths can prove more than a match for one of the deadliest malarial parasites in the world. They were shown to interrupt the life cycle of *Plasmodium falciparum*, which causes 99 per cent of deaths from malaria and is transmitted through the bite of an infected mosquito.

Researchers asked pupils from Eden Primary School in Muswell Hill, north London, to bring in soup broths made using family recipes.

They incubated extracts from 56 broths for three days with cultures of *Plasmodium falciparum* to see if any could stop the growth of the sexually immature parasites. Five of the broths curbed growth by more than 50 per cent, with two of them as effective as a leading antimalarial drug.

Four others were more than 50 per cent effective potentially stopping malarial transmission. The findings are published in the *Archives of Disease in Childhood*.

# Backing women is better for business

Helping others pays off for everyone. If women started and grew businesses at the same rate as men, the UK economy would be £250 billion better off. That's why our new programme, Back Her Business, is helping with funding, support and mentoring to get up and running.

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