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UITNODIGING

Activiteit: Lezing: 'Johann van Houdt en de inlichtingendiensten tegen nazi-Duitsland' door Caspar Cillekens
Wanneer: maandag 7 december 2026 om 19.30 uur
Locatie: Koninklijke Harmonie Ster van Maastricht, Bredestraat 19

Beste leden van de kring Maastricht en overige belangstellenden,

In deze lezing gaat **Caspar Cillekens** aan de hand van de biografie van de Sittardse winkelier **Johann van Houdt** nader in op de spionageactiviteit van de Nederlandse en buitenlandse inlichtingendiensten vanuit Limburg in de jaren dertig van de vorige eeuw.

Naarmate de agressieve bedoelingen van nazi-Duitsland duidelijker werden werd Limburg net zoals voor de Eerste Wereldoorlog een uitkijkpost voor de inlichtingendiensten. Zij wierven Limburgers van Duitse komaf of met zakelijke of familiebanden in Duitsland om te spioneren.

Tegelijkertijd probeerden de nazi's aanhang te werven onder de circa 35.000 Duitsers die in Limburg woonden. Vanuit Limburg probeerden Duitse emigranten (socialisten, communisten, katholieke priesters) het Hitler-regime te bestrijden.

Johann van Houdt kreeg na de oorlog geen erkenning voor zijn activiteiten en geen uitkering. Hij emigreerde met zijn vrouw naar Grand Rapids in de VS, waar zijn dochter Gertie al woonde. Drie jaar voor zijn overlijden in 1988 kreeg Van Houdt alsnog het Verzetsherdenkingskruis uitgereikt.



Dutch Government Honors Resistance Fighter's Courage

John VanHoudt

By Michael Cox

The 91-year-old man's blue eyes widen, his voice rises sharply and his arms make sweeping gestures.

He tells of riding a bicycle in pitch-black night through the Dutch countryside, spying for the British behind Nazi Germany's fortifications and scribbling down notes on a small piece of paper.

John VanHoudt is recalling his role in the Dutch resistance movement during World War II.

But the events that elicit the sharpest and most bitter memories are his capture by Nazi intelligence agents in 1940 and his five-year imprisonment in a concentration camp.

VanHoudt, 2320 E. Beltline Ave. SE, has not forgotten those turbulent times. Neither has his two daughters now living in Grand Rapids.

And neither has the Dutch government.

Because VanHoudt received a special citation today from the Netherlands — the Commemorative Cross, an honor reserved for those who actively participated in the Dutch resistance.

It was presented to VanHoudt by Dr. Michael Ruiter of the West Michigan Dutch Consulate on behalf of Queen Beatrix and the Dutch government's "National Committee for the Resistance to Nazi Forces in World War II."

John VanHoudt spent five years in a concentration camp after being arrested by the Nazis. His most bitter memories are his capture by Nazi intelligence agents in 1940 and his five-year imprisonment in a concentration camp.

VanHoudt was a 44-year-old owner of a music store in the Dutch border town of Sittard when he became a member of the Dutch Intelligence Service (SIS) in 1937.

His mission, which he carried out under the cover of night, was to penetrate German lines and report Nazi activities along the Siegfried Line to British agents.

He would pedal a small bicycle near German fortifications, jot down notes, return to Sittard, then take a train to Amsterdam or Rotterdam to meet with the British.

The procedure went uninterrupted for nearly three years. Until one day when Nazi intelligence agents caught wind of his activities and roared up to his house with sirens blaring to arrest him.

"They asked my wife (Cristina) if I was home, and she said it was obvious that I wasn't," VanHoudt said. "So one of them said, 'Let me tell you this. If he's not home this afternoon, we'll take you and your two daughters.'

"There was little for me to do but to go home later that day and be arrested."

VanHoudt wouldn't be seen for the next five years by his children, Gertrude VanOostendorp, who lives with her husband Jack, at 4185 44th St. SE in Kentwood, and Agnes Maintz, who with her husband Mathieu, lives at 1813 Bradford St. NE.

VanOostendorp, 65, said her family received about two letters a year from their father, who was imprisoned at the Orenienburg concentration camp in Sachsenhausen, Germany.

The letters were heavily censored, but VanOostendorp came to find out about VanHoudt's own special ministry among his fellow sufferers.

"He made a guitar out of wood and played songs at Christmas for all of the people," she said. "He helped all kinds of people stay alive with his songs and his pleasant personality.

When VanHoudt returned to Sittard, he met his family at the city hall. He weighed 80 pounds and "his head was bigger than his body," VanOostendorp recalls.

VanOostendorp moved to the Grand Rapids area in 1948 to join Jack, who had been a U.S. serviceman; her sister came afterward, as did VanHoudt in 1955.

"Papa loved his country, but after he returned from the camps, the Netherlands never looked the same to him again," VanOostendorp said. "After five years of what he went through, I don't think it would have for anybody."

In anticipation of the Commemorative Cross, however, VanHoudt's thoughts were only full of joy. He proudly displayed his keepsakes from World War II. And he strutted about, wearing his Sunday best.

"I'm so happy for him," VanOostendorp said.

Beeld: artikel uit de krant Grand Rapids News van 11 januari 1985 over de toekenning van het Verzetsherdenkingskruis aan Johann (John) van Houdt door de Nederlandse consul in Chicago

Caspar Cillekens (1953, Roermond) studeerde economische en sociale geschiedenis aan de Radboud Universiteit in Nijmegen. Hij werkte 33 jaar als journalist voor De Limburger. Hij heeft tal van publicaties op zijn naam staan over de sociale geschiedenis van Maastricht. In voorjaar 2024 verscheen 'Last van het verleden. De Sphinx en Maastricht' over de sociale geschiedenis van het keramiekbedrijf en de moeizame relatie tussen het familiebedrijf van de Regouts en de Maastrichtse samenleving.

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Met vriendelijke groeten, namens het bestuur,

Marnix van Wijk
Secretaris
LGOG-kring Maastricht

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