

'Van 't Erf Van Ermel'

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'Groenoord', a villa on Stationstraat in 1921

THE DEPORTATION OF THE JEWISH FAMILY STAAL IN MARCH 1943 [typo corrected from 1945]

By Peter Yska

In the previous issue of 'Van 't Erf van Ermel' I said that I would come up with additional information about the arrest of Jewish people at *Oude Boschweg - Ericalaan* in March 1943.

Further research has yielded much extra information. Unfortunately still not enough to describe the history of all persons involved in the arrest. But there is a better idea about what happened. The story began with the arrest of the Staal family, not at the *Oude Boschweg* but at the *Watervalweg*, halfway between Ermelo and Putten.

Oude Boschweg

On March 5, 1941 the Staal family registered in the population register of the municipality of Ermelo. They came to live at *Oude Boschweg* 28 in a house then called 'De Hazenkamp', now on the corner of *Russulalaan* and *Champignonlaan*. The family, originally living in Amsterdam at the *Weteringsschans* 243, consisted of:

Father Levie Staal, * 01-09-1900, trinkets merchant;

Mother Elisabeth Staal-Staal, * 13-07- 1900;

Son Abraham, * 16-01-1928;

Daughter Betje, * 16-01-1930;

Son Jacob, * 01-02-1932.

Daughter Mary, born on 10-06-1924 and died at almost four years of age on 30-03-1928.

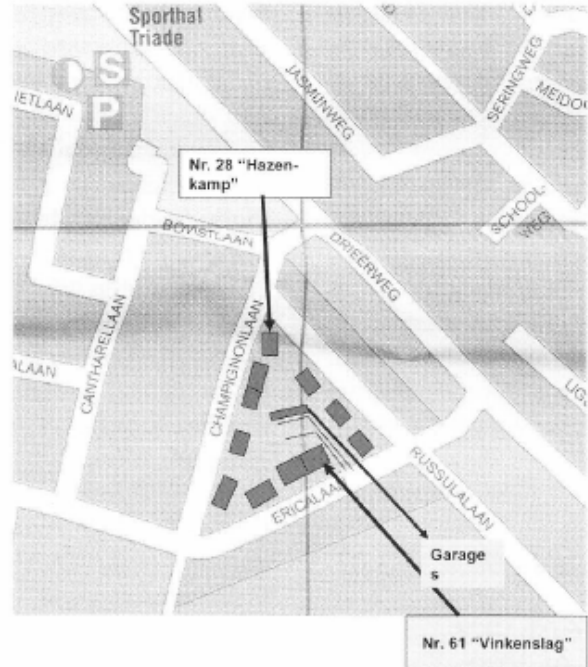
In the course of 1941, the mother of Mrs. Staal came from Amsterdam to live with them. Mrs. Betje Staal-Morpurgo, * 19-04-1877, was a widow and lived at *Boslaan* 5 in Amsterdam.

To school

The three children went to public school in Ermelo on *Burgemeester Van Oordtstraat*.

On this, Anton Rookⁱ says: "I got to know Aby, which is how he wrote his name, in the 6th or 7th grade in Mr. Van Rhee's class. His sister Betje and brother Jacob were a few years below us. At lunchtime the children would eat their lunch at our house, because their house was rather far away. My father was the director of the post office and we

lived there as well. I would also visit Aby when he still lived on the *Boschweg*.



The location of the house "De Hazenkamp" where the Staal family stayed.

His father dealt in watches and jewelry, among other things. Aby's mother was descended from a Portuguese Jewish lineage.

Sometime in 1942, my father told me that the Staal family had moved to the *Jan van Malensteinweg*, living in a summer house behind the main house. The children would then be closer to school. He also said that it would be better if I no longer went to Aby's house to play because it was safer for him. What I did notice was that the Staal children stopped attending school at some point after the summer holidays, presumably for safety reasons."

'Brem en Den'

Mr. Rook may have been right that the Staal family briefly lived in the summer cottage in the backyard behind the house on *Jan van Malensteinweg* 13, in which the painter Wim Adolfs lived. It may have been an intermediate step to erase their tracks. In fact, in the summer the family moved into the summer house called 'Brem en Den' at

Watervalweg 110 belonging to Frederik Keyzer, a manufacturer from Utrecht. The original house no longer exists and has been replaced by another. The name 'Brem en Den' still exists. In 1948, a Mr. J. van Wilgenburg started a campground by that name which still exists to this day.

Mid-March 1943

Anton Rook tells: "My father helped many people during the war years. Others probably knew about this, because one evening someone knocked at the front door of the post office during curfew. It was probably a friend or relative of the Staals, possibly Hugo Hirsch. My father was furious about the timing and use of the front door and therefore turned that person away immediately. It's possible this person was being followed, because a few days later there was a raid on the Staal family."

Monday, March 22nd, 1943

In the evening, the Staal family was visited by the owner of the property, Frederick Keyzer, Mr. Hugo Hirsch, a Jew hiding in Ermelo from Amsterdam and a non-Jewish acquaintance named G.M.H.R. Meinlieff.

In the evening the doorbell rings around a quarter past ten; for those present, it is clear they must be careful. Keyzer opens the door a crack and at the same time three men, shouting 'police', force their way into the house. Keyzer brings them to the kitchen to give the Staal parents the opportunity to flee with their children. Unfortunately, the parents run screaming through the house in a panic and thereby alert the three intruders. One of the three, the NSB Mayor Klinkenberg from Putten, presses his way into the living room with his gun drawn and orders all to hold their hands up. His cronies Jille Haaitsma, an NSB-er, and Dirk Zehnpfennig, SS and deputy municipal superintendent in Putten, then search the house. They discover the two youngest children and the grandmother in the hallway cupboard in which they were hiding. The

eldest son Aby lay in the bedroom under his bed and must, on orders of Haaitsma, the NSB-er and municipal superintendent in Putten, put his hands behind his neck and walk out in front of him. However, Aby suddenly legs it and runs into the forest, untouched by the bullets Haaitsma fires and thereby escaped arrest.

Klinkenberg and his gang determine that the Staal family is Jewish. Hugo Hirsch strongly denies this and claims to be a Christian. Meinlieff and Keyzer attempt to sway Klinkenberg into releasing the Staal family. Their pleas, however, lead to nothingⁱⁱ.

Putten Police Station

During the conversation with Klinkenberg, the NSB Head Sergeant [of the military police] Stap, having been alerted by telephone, arrives from Putten. He is a man not averse to violence. Stap warns those present not to do anything crazy, after which he proceeds to check identity cards. According to him, Hirsch's identity card is questionable and, after consultation with the others, decides to interrogate him thoroughly. Shackled together two by two, the Staal family and Hugo Hirsch are compelled to walk to the police station in Putten. Here Hirsch gets a "special" treatment from Klinkenberg and Stap. They force him to undress, whereby they note that he is circumcised and therefore is not a Christian but a Jew. They proceed to bash him for quite a while, beating and kicking him until he bleeds. Then they search Hirsch's clothing again and discover a photo of the 'Vinkenslag', a property on *Ericalaan* 61ⁱⁱⁱ.

Aby's flight

Anton Rook says, "After Aby's escape, he first waited until everything was quiet and then walked in the night to the railway. Once close to Ermelo station, he went to sit on the bank of the ditch De Maat to wait for daybreak. In the early morning he crossed the railway line to get to the home of my parent's friends, Uncle Cor and Aunt Jo Elsgest who lived at

Spoorlaan 56 (now *Dr. Van Dalelaan*). Aby knew them well and that is why he dared to knock on their door. He was quickly ushered inside but could not stay long due to the printing business at home. Elsgeest contacted my father to tell him Aby was with him and that for safety reasons he had to leave as soon as possible. Father arranged for the reliable head buyer, Arie van den Berg, who collected the post with a *bakfiets* [cargo bike] early every morning from the station, to stop by the C.T. Elsgeest family home. There Aby stepped into the covered *bakfiets*, was taken to the back of the post office, quickly brought inside and brought to my room. He stayed there for two weeks. Even my brother and little sister did not know he was there."

Transport to Westerbork

On Thursday, March 25th, the Staal family and other imprisoned Jews were put on the train in Putten that took them to Westerbork. The train also stopped in Ermelo.

Anton Rook recalls, "My father, for some or other reason, was allowed to enter the station and also get close to the wagons guarded by the German security forces guarded in which were the Jews. That's how he got the chance to inform the Staal family, who was on the train, that Aby was brought to safety."

To Sobibor

The family Staal stayed only a few days in Westerbork. On March 30th, the whole family, as "Häftling" (prisoner), was deported to Sobibor. On April 2nd, the family arrived there and Levie (42 years old), Elisabeth (42 years), Betje (13 years), Jacob (11 years) and mother (in-law) Betje (almost 66 years) were murdered shortly after arriving.

Aby's many moves

Anton Rook remembers: "In the second week of Aby's stay with us, my father was ordered to billet Germans who were meant to be bugging the telephones. They wished to use the back room and conservatory (sunroom). Their presence endangered Aby so he moved to Mrs. Aal (after the war she married Mr.

Dekker) from the tobacco shop (now Matrix). Here he got a small upstairs back room where he looked out to Jansen's painting workshop. Here he also did not stay long. My father found a hiding place for him in Apeldoorn and brought Aby there himself by car. He was namely always able, for special occasions, to rent a car from Timmer of the VAD Garage. Aby ended up with a carpenter where he could work in the daytime at the workshop. This suited him very well because he had been sitting idle. Dad did get regular updates to hear how it was going with Aby.

One day, the owner of the workshop got in an argument with a cousin of his who snapped at him: "I know a little more about you!" Shortly afterwards, Aby was busy in the workshop when a car full of Germans stopped in front of the building. Aby was able to flee just in time to a nearby forest. There he dug a hole in the ground where he spent three days and nights. Meanwhile Father Rook was also informed of the events and went back to Apeldoorn. He sought out Aby and brought him in with an old single lady in Apeldoorn where he remained until the end of the war. Shortly after the liberation he returned to the Rook family in Ermelo.

America

Anton Rook recalls: "Very soon after Aby's return Father Rook got in touch, through the Red Cross, with an uncle of his who lived on Long Island. Aby left shortly afterwards for America and attended high school, among other things. He was even a naval cadet. My parents were in regular contact with him by post. Unfortunately, my father died in June 1952 and my mother then had to abruptly pack up and leave the residence at the post office. To my great regret Aby's letters and many other papers were lost in the move. Not long after my mother's move the contact with Aby was broken. I myself still have many questions about Aby and his family during the war years to which I will presumably never find an answer."



A telegram requesting information about his family members that Aby [Aby's uncle] sent on May 5th, 1945 to the Municipality of Ermelo

Surprise visit

Aby and his wife Barbara visited Israel in June 1985. On their return flight via Schiphol they briefly interrupted their journey to go to Ermelo. They could not find my parents, and after gathering information, came to Rehoboth to visit Aunt Dekker-Aal. Eventually they ended up with me and my wife. Until that time the family was doing well. Aby was in the financial world and was a bookmaker (speculator in the financial world). After their return to America, we maintained a correspondence for a short time; however, it stopped quite abruptly. Our letters were no longer answered. Probably in the late eighties something went wrong in the financial world in America of which also Aby became the victim. We don't know what happened and never had contact again."

To conclude

In the above, you have read about the preliminary events that were reason for the raids on the *Ericalaan - Oude Boschweg* in

the early morning hours of March 23rd, 1943. More about that next time.

Sources:

- ⁱ I especially thank Mr Rook for his willingness to provide me the necessary information.
- ⁱⁱ Article: Levenslang geest tegen Klinkenberg (*Life sentence demanded for Klinkenberg*), Puttens Nieuwsblad, April 29, 1949. Article: Proces Klinkenberg (*Klinkenberg trial*), Nijkerkse Courant, April 1949. Zee, S. van der; Vogelvrij: De jacht op de joodse onderduiker (*Free as a bird: The hunt for Jews in hiding*). De Bezige Bij, 2010, p 202-205
- ⁱⁱⁱ The next edition has more information about him