

# “Lex, the game is up.”

*From Oma to her grandson Thomas, a hero's story lives on*

**MONTREAL, November 28, 2009—66 years ago, Ton Hegge's nightmare began. His sister Addie tells the story. “He was walking down the street, and the Germans stopped him. They said, ‘Lex, das Spiel ist aus’ : Lex, the game is up.” Lex: his nickname. The game: the Dutch resistance against Nazi occupation.**

Addie van Leeuwen, *née* Hegge, was only 20 years old when her older brother was executed, but she still remembers his story perfectly. A story which brings back painful memories, as I can tell listening to her in her quiet home in the Montreal suburb of LaSalle. She regularly interrupts her narrative to produce old souvenirs, like this yellow newspaper clipping from after the war showing her parents at the very spot where her brother was executed. At the sight of it, tears are hard to fight back.

Antonius Josephus Rudolphus Hegge was born on December 11, 1920, the eldest of a middle-class family from The Hague, the Netherlands. Adriana arrived three years later. She remembers that from childhood on, ingenious young Tonnie already had a rebellious streak. He never submitted to authority, much to the chagrin of the Jesuits who ran the strict school he attended. He finally completed high school in a public boarding school.

With the Second World War looming, 19-year-old Ton — “He found ‘Tonnie’ too childish,” recalls Addie — briefly worked in his father's export business, but a strained relationship with his parents made the situation near-unbearable. So he found work elsewhere.

On May 10, 1940, Nazi Germany invaded the Netherlands. Despite the occupation, life goes on for the Hegge family. In late 1942, Ton was working for the Pension Bureau. His problems started when the Nazis decided to round up single young men. Germany desperately needed workers, with most of their own nationals fighting in the war. In December, Ton finds himself peeling potatoes in a camp near Berlin, with hundreds of other young men from across Europe, until they are assigned somewhere else. Daily life is dull, but easy. Apart from a roll-call and a curfew, Ton can go about freely.

Finally, in January 1943, a German official announces to Ton and his companions that they are “very lucky, a privileged group”: they will be trained to become pilots. Ton doesn’t share the official’s enthusiasm for becoming a Luftwaffe pilot and the next morning, he takes the first train back home to The Hague. By the time his absence is noticed, he’s already disappeared somewhere in his hometown. His liberty comes at a price, though: Ton is an *onderduiker*, hiding from Nazi authorities like so many others because they refused to go to Germany or because they’re Jewish.



Photo taken in January 1943 in Berlin

“The Germans knocked on our door at nine in the morning” recalls Addie. Her mother was still in bed and knew nothing of her son’s escape. She even had received a letter from him a few days before, which she waved in the Germans’ face as proof. “They were so intimidated that they didn’t even search the house!” chuckles Addie. But the Hegge parents were being honest: they had no inkling about their son’s underground existence. What they found out later, they learned through Ton’s friends who survived.

Early 1943. Young Ton, alias Lex, gets involved with an Utrecht-based resistance group, the *Oranje Vrijbuiters* (“Orange Liberators”, loosely translated—orange is The Netherlands’ royal color). This group’s primary mission was to help *onderduikers* by stealing food coupons, essential for buying food and other basic essentials. Like other resistance groups, they also had ties with British espionage and they occasionally carried out sabotage operations against the Nazi occupiers.

However, all was not right within the *Oranje Vrijbuiters* ranks: one by one, its members were discovered and arrested by the Germans. These systematic arrests were highly suspicious, and one member, Joop de Heus, became the prime suspect: he was also arrested but strangely was released by the authorities. Was he a traitor? His closest friends, the Hey brothers, swore he wasn’t. In any

case, it was Ton's, alias Lex, turn to be picked up. Walking in Amsterdam, he was confronted by two German agents who greeted him with this sinister phrase: "Lex, das Spiel ist aus." — The game is up.

Ton was taken to Scheveningen, where The Hague's largest prison had been converted to hold the Nazis' political prisoners. A tiny envelope found its way to the Hegge mailbox with the following anonymous and ominous message: "Your son has been caught and he is in the Scheveningen prison. He badly needs a lawyer." A lawyer is hired — "A female lawyer, which was quite rare for the time," notes Addie — and attempts to get information about Ton. The official response: "There is no Antonius Hegge here."

At long last, the lawyer obtains a meeting with the prison director, who slyly suggested Ton had fled to Switzerland like so many other *onderduikers* did during the war. But when the lawyer relays the conversation in the family's living room on the night of February 28, 1944, Ton's parents are skeptical.

With reason. At the same moment, at The Hague's Supreme Court, their son and 19 of his *Oranje Vrijbuiters* companions are sentenced to death by the Nazis. The next day, the men are assembled to meet their fate. At the last moment, two are inexplicably pulled from the group; they are sent to concentration camps and ultimately survive. One of them, Bert Hey, hears Ton's final words: "Please, say goodbye to my parents."

On February 29, 1944, the remaining 18 members of the Dutch resistance group are executed in the dunes of Scheveningen, just a few steps from the beach. Antonius Hegge was 23 years old.

The family hears the news the very morning. The father, first to know, pedals across the city to announce the tragedy to his wife, who was visiting a relative. Addie only returns home at the end of the day. "I came into the kitchen. My sister Lily and my brothers Harry and Jan were working in silence, a dark look on their face. 'What is it?' I asked. 'Tonnie was executed!' cried Lily, before breaking down uncontrollably." Addie's voice is strained in emotion.

According to some official statistics, 1,700 members of the Dutch resistance died during World War II. Other estimates are as high as 3,100 killed. Whatever the number, if arrested, members of the resistance were almost systematically executed. After the war, it was confirmed that the *Oranje Vrijbuiters* had been betrayed by one of their own: Joop de Heus.

Today a commemorative plaque adorns the front of the Scheveningen prison and is always decorated with fresh flowers, “something I have always appreciated,” says Addie. In 1947, the remains of her brother along with those of his friends, were transferred from the dunes to a memorial in an Utrecht cemetery. Pausing between two sentences, Addie produces a brown envelope which contains a few shreds of clothes. Among them, a piece of underwear marked *T.H.*: it was found on her brother’s body. A relic from another age that drives home the tragedy.

In one of The Hague’s recent residential developments, a small lane is now named after Antonius Hegge. Slim consolation for his family, my family. But it is nevertheless a way to honor the memory of my great-uncle, who gave his life for a noble cause like so many others between 1939 and 1945.



Den Haag, 52°03'44.0"N 4°23'43.6"E

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