

# What can never be forgotten

Concentration camp testimony by  
Jeanne Bommezijn-de Rochemont



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Adriënne Baars-Schuyt

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## *Illustrations*

### Cover:

- Piece of embroidery by Titia Gorter, Collection Resistance Museum Amsterdam, with special permission from Paul Prinsen
- Part of the handkerchief of Greet Ziegler, courtesy of Evelien Pullens
- Blue and white camp dress in Buchenwald Museum (A. Baars)
- Texts in Dutch and English by Jeanne Bommezijn-de Rochemont

### p. 12: Embroidery from the Oranjehotel

- Handkerchief with embroidered names from the Oranjehotel
- Piece of embroidery by Titia Gorter, Collection Resistance Museum Amsterdam

### p. 14: Family tree

- Photo Pieter Rutgardus de Rochemont
- Photo Wilhelmine Louise Cornelia de Rochemont
- Marriage or engagement photo's, courtesy of Fred Bommezijn
- Photo Willem Wiebenga
- Photo Hans Bommezijn

### p. 24: Jeanne Bommezijn and To Stoltz

- Drawing To Stoltz, Jeanne Bommezijn and Trijn Hulleman, courtesy of Rijksmuseum Amsterdam
- Photo Ans van Velzen, courtesy of José Hopman-van Velzen
- Photo of plane on return in the Netherlands, collection Resistance Museum Amsterdam<sup>1</sup>
- Drawing of To Stoltz (by Aat Breur) and of Aat Breur (by To Stoltz), courtesy of Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

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### p. 63: Map of Ravensbrück by Dr Alvise Barison, Arolsen Archives<sup>2</sup>

### p. 66: Photo Trien de Haan, courtesy Bart Lankester

### pp. 66 and 76 – Other photos are available via the public domain

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<sup>1</sup> [Beeldbankwo2.nl/nl/beelden/detail/6cd38f4a-025a-11e7-904b-d89d6717b464/media/7a2fac3d-93e7-4f4a-63ab-b67f43f49101](https://beeldbankwo2.nl/nl/beelden/detail/6cd38f4a-025a-11e7-904b-d89d6717b464/media/7a2fac3d-93e7-4f4a-63ab-b67f43f49101).

<sup>2</sup> [Collections.arolsen-archives.org/en/document/82149884](https://collections.arolsen-archives.org/en/document/82149884).

## Preface

This book consists of three parts, first an introduction to the life of Jeanne Bommezijn-de Rochemont and a description of the war years. The second part, the heart of this book, is her account of two years in Ravensbrück, with an explanation of terms and an overview of the women who also played a role there. Underlined text (term or name) can be found in § 6.1 or 6.2 respectively. The last part is about the *Englandspiel*, or in German terms *Sache Nordpol*. Many books have been published about this subject, with contradictory conclusions. Although there is a monument commemorating the 54 agents, there were many more victims who were betrayed and captured. It is important to pay attention to this. Even for those who survived, such as Jeanne Bommezijn, this secret services' *spiel* had a large impact.

This book could not have come about without the information and support of various people with whom I have been in contact about Jeanne Bommezijn or other people in this book. Therefore, I would like to extend a special note of gratitude to: Fred Bommezijn, Hans Wiebenga and Valerie Ramsperger and the other (great) grandchildren of Jeanne Bommezijn for information about the families. I also would like to thank Victor Laurentius, Illy van Voerst van Lynden, Jan van Ommen, Evelien Pullens, Paul Prinsen and Bart Lankester for other important information.

Elsa Frank-Reitsma gave permission to use the drawings To Stoltz made in Ravensbrück and Sweden. Thomas Kunz and Monika Schnell of Ravensbrück Mahn/ und Gedenkstätte helped me verify data. Without access to the digital collection of Arolsen Archives, there would have been less documentary facts to corroborate the stories. Lists and entry forms can help to verify facts, but it is important that the human experiences are relayed by sharing their stories.

Sometimes the archive yields gems such as the photo of Mies Boissevain and the map of Dr Alvisé Barison. I would also like to thank Youri Baars, Mireille Akkerman and Kees Schuyt for their comments. How I dealt with the comments is on my own account, but it prevented me from tunnel vision and hopefully made the text more understandable.

I want to contribute this book to all who died before their time and to all who had to live with traumatic experiences. Sharing stories helps remembering and it is very important to continue to do this. Therefore initiatives such as developed by the Sanderling Foundation, the Blue Barge, Every Face has a Name and the Dutch 'War sources' site are important.



# Part 1

## 1 Introduction

On 30 January 2019, I received an email from the International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen with seven lists. This was an answer to my question what was known about Jeanne Bommezijn-de Rochemont (1891–1958) during WWII. What do these lists tell about her and the people she was incarcerated with? Or can more be gained from a drawing made by To Stoltz (en route to Sweden) and an embroidered handkerchief from Scheveningen prison?

The handkerchief was a hidden gem and a coincidental find, something which happened quite a few times during my research. The stories about the names on the handkerchief can serve as a framework for Jeanne Bommezijns account of her time in Ravensbrück. Although I read quite a few testimonies in my research on Dutch women in Nazi concentration camps, I was not aware of her story until I came across her name in Sarah Helm's *If this is a Woman*.<sup>3</sup> Helm does not mention many Dutch women, only Corrie ten Boom (who published in English), midwife Neeltje Epker (testimony at the Nuremberg trials) and the Jewish Selma Velleman who survived the concentration camps Vught and Ravensbrück under a false identity, as well as some groups of Dutch women. Sarah Helm referred to the Imperial War Museum in London which keeps 'Private Papers of Mrs J Bommezijn de Rochemont'. The short description is:

*"Two copies of a well written ts memoir, translated into English (19pp), written in 1946 by a Dutch civilian describing her experiences while held in Ravensbruck Concentration Camp (1943–1945) after being arrested by the Germans for giving shelter to a British airman [...]"*<sup>4</sup>

When I visited the Imperial War Museum to read these private papers, I learned that it was sent to the museum in 2005, by the widow of Ken Walsh who visited Jeanne Bommezijn-de Rochemont in The Hague in 1948. Apart from the manuscript I have not found any connection, nor the reason why she wanted to translate her testimony. The English typescript is dated August 1946.

The Dutch original – a 103-page testimony written shortly after liberation – was located at the NIOD (number 244.276), entitled 'Wat men nooit meer vergeten kan' [What can never be forgotten] and a misspelled author's name:

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<sup>3</sup> Published in Dutch, *Schrijven uit zelfbehoud* [Writing for Self-preservation], 2024, <https://publishnl.bookmundo.com/bookdetails/371337>; Sarah Helm, *If this is a woman. Inside Ravensbrück: Hitler's concentration camp for women*. London: Little Brown, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Imperial War Museum, Documents.13711; [www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1030013527](http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1030013527).