

Vuijsje, I., *Tegen beter weten in. Zelfbedrog en ontkenning in de Nederlandse geschiedschrijving over de jodenvervolgning* (Amsterdam, Antwerpen: Augustus, 2006, 237 blz., €18,90, ISBN 90 457 0066 2).

It was only a matter of time before someone decided to re-examine the question of ‘what did they know and when did they know it’ in relation to contemporary Dutch awareness of the persecution, and specifically the annihilation of the Jews deported to Poland between 1942 and 1944. The long-held and widely accepted view was that knowledge of what happened to Jews deported from Dutch soil was limited, and even where evidence was presented through radio broadcasts or through the clandestine press, it was not believed by the recipients. This view then framed the judgements made about the (lack of) help for the Jews by government officials, community leaders and the Dutch population in general during the occupation. In this book, Vuijsje seeks to overturn that comfortable postwar version of events and suggests that there were many occasions when hard information about what was really happening to those being ‘resettled’ was received and recorded by those in the Netherlands.

Vuijsje’s stated purpose is twofold; putting the record straight and attacking previous accounts, although the latter is given much more attention than the former. His main criticism is reserved for the historians of the *jodenvervolgning*, and particularly on the conclusions reached by Louis de Jong in *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* who, he argues, took the line that postwar Dutch society wanted to believe rather than the one that the sources dictated. (209-210) De Jong had spent the war years in London as a journalist, but Vuijsje is also critical of two other Jewish authors, the lawyer Abel Herzberg and the professional historian Jacques Presser, for downplaying the true knowledge that the Dutch had about the ultimate fate of the Jews in Poland. These charges are serious enough, but the book goes further by insinuating that all three were not just guilty of reflecting an acceptable version of events, but that as historians and chroniclers they knowingly omitted or manipulated sources that suggested a wider knowledge of the death camps. The book also examines the behaviour and statements of the leading members of the Joodse Raad and the Dutch government-in-exile, but these are topics that have been extensively debated elsewhere in the last fifteen years and it is the critique of the historical writing that forms the centre of this text. Vuijsje provides a wealth of examples to bolster his conclusions and at first glance the case seems unanswerable. However, a closer examination of the arguments, and of the assumptions made by the author, do suggest that one needs to approach the conclusions with care, especially with a subject that is beset by so many problems of euphemistic usage.

One central element of the book is the vexed question of what the population at large could have known about the persecution of the Jews. The fact that the penetration of radio broadcasts and illegal newspapers to the Dutch population is, itself, a matter of debate makes any additional speculation on awareness about the precise fate of the Jews fraught with difficulty. With very few contemporary measures of public knowledge and public opinion in the wartime Netherlands, it will never be possible to reconstruct a picture of what was known and by whom. Certainly the de Jong version — of limited knowledge and no certainties — fitted the desired image for

the majority of those who experienced the occupation. Yet even if Vuijsje is right that far more was actually broadcast and published — and in far more unequivocal terms than hitherto acknowledged - does this mean that the Dutch should feel greater guilt for what took place? The fact that they may have heard or read in the press about the *uitroeing* of the Jews does not mean that they acknowledged it as fact, and even possessing such knowledge does not necessarily mean that they then believed what they were being told. One argument put forward, among many in this book, is that at least 100,000 Dutch people knew about or suspected the annihilation of the Jews as they were the ‘hosts’ of those Jews who attempted to go underground. (116) This implies that they were only helping the Jews because their guests’ lives were under threat, yet there were many more Dutch people sheltering fellow countrymen and foreigners from fates less extreme, for example escaped prisoners of war and labour draft evaders. *Levensgevaar* was not the only reason for providing such help during the occupation.

The problem with books that purport to be iconoclastic and have a new angle on an existing orthodoxy is that the authors are almost obliged to overstate the case. Vuijsje can point to many cases where fuller quotation of sources might have changed the sense of what was being conveyed but even Louis de Jong, with all the resources of RIOD/NIOD at his disposal and with no apparent word limit for his publication, knew that those sources had to be digested and interpreted. Vuijsje claims that it was the interpretation that was at fault, and that this was not done accidentally, but deliberately - to minimise the guilt of those who really had known what was happening in the forests of Eastern Poland. This is a serious charge and one that goes to the heart of de Jong’s credibility as the historian of the Netherlands’ wartime experiences. If he cannot be trusted on this most critical issues for Dutch society, can he be trusted on anything else? Other elements of de Jong’s interpretation and methodology have been challenged by both journalists and historians in the years since his master work was published, resulting in a more nuanced and better understanding of the period. Perhaps because, even now, the *jodenvervolging* remains a problematic issue for the Netherlands, it continues to produce emotive rather than considered texts that, while opening some important new avenues of enquiry both on the event itself and its postwar historiography, do little to sponsor sober and considered debate on the issue.

Bob Moore

Winter, R. de, Loo, E. van, *Luchtmachtbevelhebbers geportretteerd 1954-2005* (Den Haag: Koninklijke Luchtmacht, 2006, 443 blz., €59,95, ISBN 90 73696 28 3).

In het Woord Vooraf van de Commandant Luchtstrijdkrachten bij dit kloeke en fraai verzorgde boek wordt terecht gewag gemaakt van een ‘grootscheepse reorganisatie’ van de Nederlandse strijdkrachten. Deze had onder veel meer tot gevolg dat de functies van Bevelhebber der Zee-, Land- en Luchtstrijdkrachten historie werden. Dat er maar betrekkelijk kort een ‘Bevelhebber der Luchtstrijdkrachten’ is geweest, kan daardoor worden verklaard dat de Koninklijke Luchtmacht pas in 1953 een zelfstandig krijgsmacht-onderdeel werd. Vooraf ging een periode van veertig jaar waarin het Nederlandse luchtwapen voorzover het deel uitmaakte van het leger hier te lande en vroeger ook van het KNIL naar zelfstandigheid toegroeide of, om de woordkeuze van de auteurs over te nemen, zich ging kenmerken door een steeds sterker ‘emancipatiestreven’. (23) De auteurs, medewerkers van het Nederlandse Instituut voor Militaire Historie, hebben hun taak zo opgevat dat zij ook zodanige aandacht besteden aan de zojuist aangeduide voorgeschiedenis, dat deze behoorlijk uit de verf komt. Overigens had ik persoonlijk graag wat meer aandacht besteed gezien aan het Wapen der Militaire Luchtvaart van het KNIL met zijn vooral politiek-strategisch gezien zo interessante geschiedenis.

Na dit inleidende gedeelte volgen veertien biografische opstellen, evenals het overige boek rijk geïllustreerd. Tot de illustraties behoren ook reproducties van de veertien portretten van bevelhebbers in het bezit van de Koninklijke Luchtmacht, een galerij die indertijd tot stand gekomen is op initiatief van de N.V. Fokker en later aangevuld is door de zorg van Stork Aerospace (men zou wel graag willen weten van wiens of wier hand deze schilderijen zijn, maar dat wordt niet vermeld). In deze geschreven portretten hebben de auteurs een goed evenwicht gevonden tussen biografie en organisatiegeschiedenis: men krijgt een duidelijk beeld van de persoonlijkheid van de besproken figuur maar ook van ruim een halve eeuw ontwikkeling van de Nederlandse luchtmacht, van de politiek-strategische, technische en maatschappelijke processen die erop inwerkten.

Zeer boeiend vind ik het laatste hoofdstuk. Daarin wordt een prosopografisch ‘profiel’ gepresenteerd van de veertien bevelhebbers. Het lezen daarvan levert soms verrassingen op. Zo bezaten, in tegenstelling tot wat men wellicht verwachten zou, niet meer dan negen van de veertien het vliegbrevet. Van hen bezochten elf de Koninklijke Militaire Academie. Eén hunner is overigens, zoals dat genoemd werd, ‘van de opleiding ontheven’ omdat hij in het huwelijk trad, wat cadetten toen nog niet was toegestaan. H. Schaper maakte als schout-bij-nacht de overstap van de Marine naar de luchtmacht. Hij heeft nooit de adelborstenopleiding gevolgd, niet omdat hij zulks niet graag had gewild maar omdat de ‘later rijzige’ (48) Schaper niet de vereiste minimumlengte bezat. Dezelfde Schaper was de enige bevelhebber die onderscheiden werd met de Militaire Willemsorde. Hij was echter zeker niet de enige onder hen die in zijn loopbaan één of meer spannende momenten beleefde, al dan niet onder oorlogsomstandigheden. Zo nam D. Berlijn, die later ‘doorschoof’ naar de functie van Bevelhebber der Strijdkrachten, in 1977 als vlieger deel aan de actie tegen de Molukse treinkapers bij De Punt. A.B. Wolff maakte in 1942 geschiedenis door kort vóór de