

WILLEM ARONDEUS

**"He was the great hero who was most willing to give his life for the cause."
-Frieda Belinfante, describing Willem Arondeus.**

Willem Arondeus was born in 1894 in Amsterdam. At age 17, his relationship with his family broke down over the reveal of his homosexuality, and he left home never to maintain regular contact again. Once he was on his own, he worked as a painter, befriending other artists and forming a strong social network. He also turned to writing when painting did not help him to make ends meet.

Same-sex relationships had been legal in the Netherlands for over 100 years, and Willem was very open about his sexuality. However, when Nazis invaded the Netherlands in 1940, they quickly oversaw the re-criminalization of homosexuality. Willem was one of the first to join the Dutch resistance.

Willem published anti-Nazi pamphlets and recruited others to join the resistance, including his friend Frieda Belinfante. One of the resistance's major activities was forging identity papers for Jews and others being hunted by the Nazis, which capitalized on Willem's skills as an artist.

Eventually, the Nazis began to catch on to the false documents and began to compare them to public records, revealing Jews who were in hiding. The resistance came up with a plan. On the night of March 27, 1943, dressed as a German Army captain, Willem marched into the Public Records Office with a dozen members of the Resistance. They drugged the guards, placed explosives, and made history. By destroying hundreds of records they saved the lives of those whose identity the Gestapo could no longer track.

Within a few days, someone had betrayed the entire group that had bombed the office, and the Gestapo captured them all, including Willem. He took full responsibility for the bombing, but they were tried in a sham trial, where everyone was condemned to death. The Nazis executed all 13 of the fighters involved by firing squad on July 1, 1943.

Willem has been declared a Righteous Among the Nations, an honor used to describe non-Jewish people who put themselves at risk to defend the Jews during the Holocaust. He has the legacy of being considered one of the most dedicated and creative members of the Dutch Underground during WWII.

His famous final words were:

"Let it be known. Homosexuals are not cowards."



Sources, biographies, and additional reading
can be found at hcofpg.org/pride

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