

## FLANDERS RESISTANCE GROUP: PIETER-PAUL BAETEN



*Pieter-Paul Baeten*

We never talk about them enough, but there were great Resistance fighters in Flanders. Among these patriots was Pieter-Paul Baeten.

Pieter-Paul was born in Lier (Province of Antwerp) on March 23, 1926. When war was declared and our country was invaded by Wehrmacht troops, he was a student attending the Royal Athenaeum of Berchem, in the Province of Antwerp.

A studious student, he took courses in Latin-Greek taught by a professor who wore the Nazi uniform. For the young student this was something unbearable thing that he considered he must

fight at all costs.

So, with about fifteen classmates, he joined the Resistance in the «Witte Brigade Fidelio» group in Lier. He was in charge of printing and distributing leaflets calling people to resist the enemy. He was then assigned to the mail service and risked being arrested by transmitting the messages of his chiefs.

Becoming increasingly daring, the young man stole ration cards and stamps as well as blank identity papers from the municipal administrations of the Lier region. He also travelled through Wallonia in search of farms that could hide survivors of plane crashes or Resistance fighters wanted by the Gestapo. With his group of friends, he formed a kind of fighting unit from the shadows that showed extraordinary courage.

Unfortunately, on October 15, 1943, the group was denounced by traitors to the Germans. Arrested, the young men were taken directly to the Antwerp prison and held incommunicado. Pieter-Paul would experience the torture and other evil acts of the Gestapo. But he held out against this. Having failed to obtain any useful information, his torturers deported him to Germany as a political prisoner «Nacht und Nebel».

He went to several Nazi camps, including Essen prison and Esterwegen concentration camp, as well as those at Gross-Rosen, Mittelbau-Dora and the Boelcke-Kaserne of Nordhausen. All stages of this “journey” would be marked by torture, beatings and ill-treatment by the camp guards. The young man would experience hunger, thirst, lack of sleep and the diseases that usually attack the bruised bodies of degenerate youth.

On April 4, 1945, Pieter-Paul Baeten was freed by American troops. He was then taken home to Lier where he met his parents. He still only weighed 34 kilos.



*The Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp was liberated by the Allies in 1945. They discovered the horror.*

Throughout his life he would testify to the horror of concentration camps and the despicable nature of collaboration. By going to schools, he would continue tirelessly to warn his contemporaries, and especially the younger generations, of the danger of the ideas of the extreme right, of anti-Semitism and xenophobia.

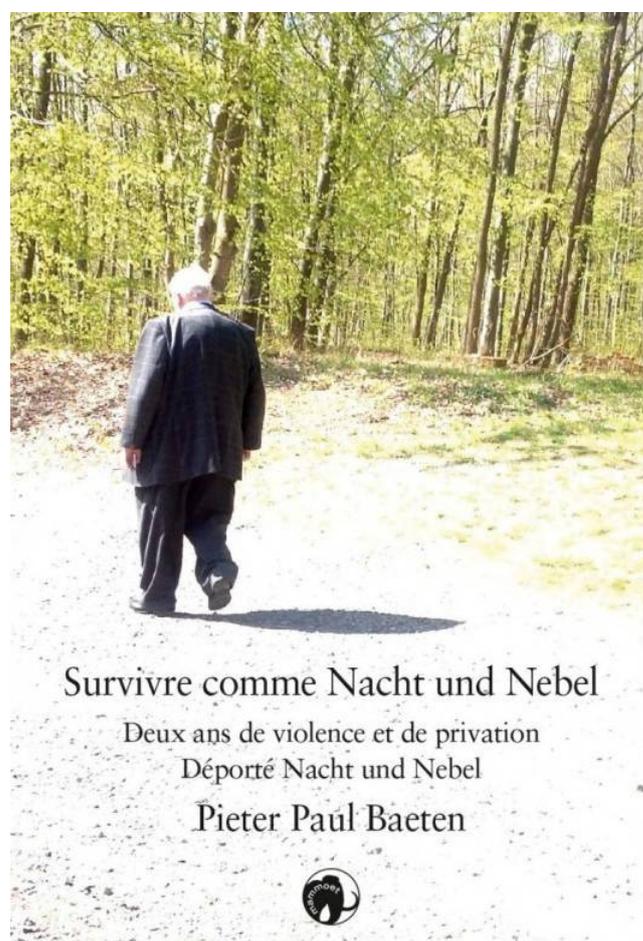
He took over the “Groupe Mémoire-Herinnering Groep” after the death of Dr André Wynen and did not hesitate to intervene in public debate whenever he deemed it necessary. With the “Groupe mémoire”, he closely followed the preparation by the President of the Government of the French Community’s decree concerning sharing and passing on Remembrance. He was also National President of the Association “Les Amis de Buchenwald” and guided young Belgians during pilgrimages organized in the former concentration camps.

He was also one of the promoters of a manifesto resolutely hostile to any form of amnesty. He said, “We cannot accept steps that, under the pretext of social reconciliation, lead to a denial of the values of democracy. Today, voices are being heard advocating extinguishing the duty of Remembrance to freedom fighters. They demand forgetfulness for the benefit of collaborators. They propose a general amnesty measure that would seek to deny wrongdoing, erase convictions, and treat as victims those who have engaged in collaboration.”

A convinced patriot, he systematically refused to participate in commemorations in which members of the separatist party of the NVA were present. He justified this way of doing things because it was for Belgium that the Resistance fought.

At the end of his life, Pieter Paul Baeten wanted to bequeath an honest testimony to some of his experiences recorded in the book “Survive as Nacht und Nebel”, written in both national languages.

He passed away on November 20, 2017.



*The book «Survive as Night and Fog», moral testament of the witness Pieter-Paul Baeten*