

The Just: How Six Unlikely Heroes Saved Thousands of Jews from the Holocaust

Jan Brokken

David McKay, Translator

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Jan Brokken's history text *The Just* documents a rescue operation to save Jews from the Holocaust in Nazi-occupied Lithuania.

When Jan Zwartendijk became the branch manager of the Dutch company Philips in Lithuania, he had no idea that he would find himself at the center of the highest level of international intrigue. Zwartendijk's stay in Lithuania lasted only a few years, but it coincided with the outbreak of World War II and the Baltic phase of the Holocaust.

Because of the Nazi sympathies of his predecessor, Zwartendijk found himself appointed Dutch consul to Lithuania. As consul, he began issuing travel visas for Jews fleeing for their lives. Their final destination was Curaçao, a Caribbean island colonized by the Dutch. Because the European continent was under Nazi control, Zwartendijk used his wit and connections to create an escape route through the Soviet Union to Shanghai, China, where a community of Jewish refugees came to be established. The exact number of Jews who Zwartendijk saved is unknown; single visas were used to usher whole groups to safety.

Deep dives into archives, and documented encounters with people who were involved in the operation, contribute to a strong narrative about ordinary people performing extraordinary deeds at great risk to their personal safety. The lives of some of the people who were saved are chronicled, as are the struggles of Zwartendijk's family and friends to have him officially recognized for his work on behalf of Jewish people, an experience of which he was robbed during his own lifetime.

In telling the life story of Jan Zwartendijk, *The Just* adds one more piece to the memory of the Holocaust.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (July / August 2021)

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