

## Mr. Menten's deals

### **Pieter Nicolaas Menten (26.5.1899-14.11.1987): art collector, war criminal**

Menten attends a commercial high school and then works in his father's business. He turns out to be a show-off at an early age, falsely claiming that his family is descended from the founders of Unilever and Royal Dutch Petroleum. His father was a butcher who later deals in rags and waste paper.

From 1923 onwards, Menten works as a sales agent in the export of Dutch goods to Poland. He resides in the Free City of Danzig, which was under the supervision of the League of Nations. Within a short time, he becomes a millionaire and subsequently, the largest timber trader between Holland and Eastern Europe. Because of dubious business practices (**bankruptcy offence, fraud**), he soon faces the threat of criminal proceedings. In 1924, he is imprisoned for a few months in Lwow following an extradition request from Danzig. As the pavement in Danzig becomes too hot for him, he moves his residence to Lwów (Lemberg / Lviv).

In Lwow, he makes the acquaintance of **Isaak Pistiner** (Pistyner), a Jewish merchant, who had bought two large estates from Princess Maria Lubomirska. The two become business partners, and Menten leases a hunting lodge near Sopot from Pistiner. The hyperinflation in Poland in the mid- 1930s gives anyone owning Dutch guilders great opportunities for profit. His business partner, on the other hand, experiences financial difficulties and has to sell the Sopot estate to Menten. It is a large hunting ground with a statehouse in Sopot south of Boryslaw (Galicia). Following 1935, Menten and Pistyner have a bitter dispute over land rights. Menten presents himself as an employer and benefactor of the local population of Sopot and the surrounding area - including the Jews. In the meantime, he has become socially accepted, becomes a naturalized Pole and honorary Dutch consul in Krakow.

After the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, Menten retreats to his property in Sopot. When the Soviets unexpectedly invade eastern Poland two weeks later, Menten is arrested for working for the SS security service, the SD. He escapes from Stryj prison with the help of **Samuel Schiff**, a Jew from Podhorodce.

With the help of the Dutch consul in Lemberg (formerly Lwów), he manages to get into German-occupied Poland. On 27 December 1939 he arrives in Krakow and quickly establishes close contacts among the German occupying forces, especially with **Karl Eberhard Schöngarth**, commander of the Security Police and the SD (BdS) in the *Generalgouvernement*. Within a few days, he can be seen in Krakow in the uniform of an *SS-Hauptscharführer*. His contacts pay off, and he serves the occupation regime as an economic advisor and expert. In a short time, he becomes a trustee of five Jewish art shops and liquidator of 27 Jewish companies as well as 20 Jewish antiquarian bookshops, bookstores and libraries. He profits greatly from the **Aryanization** of Jewish property.

His voluntary enlistment to the Einsatzkommando zur besonderen Verwendung (EKzbV) in 1941 is supported by Schöngarth. In order to prevent Polish resistance, 21 professors of Polish origin are arrested on 3 and 4 July 1941 under Schöngarth's leadership in Lwów and murdered together with their relatives in the following days (45 people in total). In the "**Massacre of Lwów professors**" (Lemberger *Professoren-mord*), Menten demonstrably participated in arrests and interrogations. Menten is able to acquire the apartment holding the inventory of the murdered professor, **Tadeusz Ostrowski**, for the ridiculously low sum of 25,000 Reichsmark. He also appropriates the apartment of the art-collecting professor, **Jan Grek**. He has the loot brought to Krakow with four furniture vans and an SS vehicle. Parts of this loot was probably also intended for Wawel Castle in Krakow, the seat of government of the Governor General Hans Frank since there is a fervent exchange between the parties involved.



The EkzbV is split up, and the individual murder squads are sent to the countryside. Menten, as interpreter and SS "*Sonderführer*", is assigned to a command operating in the Stryj valley – a region Menten knows well. On 7 July 1941 Menten, together with other men, shoot and kill 20- 30 Jews in the village of **Podhorodce** (Ukrainian Pidhirotosi, 5 km from Sopot), and 20 days later, the Jewish women of this village as well. His participation in the mass shootings in **Urycz** with 175 victims (also 5 km away from Podhorodce), **Schodnica** (13 km away),

**Dovne** (10 km away) can be ascertained, given the spatial and temporal proximity as well as several eye-witness testimonies. Within a radius of 15 kilometres, the majority of the Jewish rural population was thus exterminated by these murderers right at the beginning of the German occupation. These commandos, however, did not only carry out their bloody trade solely in the Stryj valley. The mass shooting in **Kropivnik**, more than 100 km away, is also attributed to Menten's command. Menten was not convicted of these deeds, nor was he convicted of his proven participation in the Lwów massacre. According to Soviet sources, Menten participated in the shooting of approximately 1,000 Jews. Within the SS, he is said to have expressed particular enthusiasm for shooting Jews. Personal enrichment from the property of the murdered was common. Menten also leads a personal campaign of revenge by searching for and killing as many relatives of Isaak Pistyner as possible. Following the massacres south of Boryslaw, he returns to Krakow.

The *Generalgouvernement* is soon considered a haven of corruption. On **suspicion of bribery and personal enrichment**, Menten is arrested in Krakow on 21 July 1942 and is forced to stay as an "honorary prisoner" in an unlocked room, from which he escapes four weeks later. After being re-arrested, the legal proceedings are dragged

out and finally suppressed because of the involvement of leading SS men. In the meantime, [Menten gets all goods](#) that have been confiscated returned to him .

1943: Menten has to take up residence in the Netherlands again, but is allowed to take all his possessions with him. *"For this purpose, two larger and three smaller furniture vans were loaded onto railway wagons. Another wagon carried one car and 16 loose freight items. Eleven suitcases with particularly valuable contents also travelled in Menten's personal luggage. In addition, he had received permission to transfer foreign currency to the Netherlands in the amount of 575,000 Zloty (the equivalent of 287,500 Reichsmark)."* ([https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pieter\\_Menten](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pieter_Menten) , accessed on 26.2.2020)

Menten often receives visits from Schöngarth, who is now BdS in the Netherlands. He is also involved in the collection of looted works of art for the *Führermuseum* Linz. After the end of the war, Menten is considered a millionaire many times over.

In 1945, Menten is arrested as a Nazi collaborator, but is soon released due to lack of evidence. He claims that he suffered damages of 4 million guilders from robbery of his unguarded house and mismanagement of his confiscated property. In 1953 he receives [compensation from the Dutch government in the amount of 320,000 guilders](#).

In 1946, Schöngarth confirms under interrogation that Menten was a member of the EKzbV and Menten goes underground. After arrest, he is sentenced to one year in prison in 1949 for collaboration with the enemy (working as an interpreter in the uniform of the Nazi forces). The mass murders in Galicia are left out. A Polish extradition request in 1950 is rejected by the Dutch government. **Haviv Kanaan**, a nephew of Isaak Pistyner, presents evidence to the Dutch justice system in 1952 that Menten is responsible for the murder of many family members. Kanaan, who prior to emigrating to Palestine in 1935, was called Lieber Krumholz and was a close friend of "Uncle" Menten, learns in 1944 from a surviving neighbour, Jakob Loebel about the fate of his family: *"Menten killed them! Your parents, your brother and almost all your relatives from Lwów."*

In contrast, Menten presents himself to German authorities as a victim of National Socialism and an aide to persecuted Jews .- He claims that he had been robbed by the Nazis of furnishings and art objects from his apartment in Lwów in revenge. The [Federal Republic of Germany pays him 550,000 DM in 1965 as compensation for alleged losses](#). In 1977 [his assets are estimated at 300 million DM](#). His 20-room villa is full of valuable works of art (e.g. works by Nicolas Maes and Francisco Goya) and he owns many properties and plots of land.

Until 1976, he lives a carefree life. In that year, he wants to sell his apartment in Amsterdam. Because his country house near Blaricum is already crammed with works of art, he has no room for more. Menten, art collector and alleged victim of National Socialism, therefore announces in an interview with the daily ***De Telegraaf***

that 425 works of art are to be auctioned at **Sotheby's-Mak van Waay**. He had acquired the works of art in pre-war Poland. Haviv Kanaan, who is now a journalist for the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, writes an investigative article about Menten. **Hans Knoop**, editor-in-chief of *Accent*, a magazine belonging to the *Telegraaf* group, begins his own research and writes a series of articles on the mass murders in Galicia and Menten's involvement. Polish and Israeli witnesses are interviewed on television. In September 1976, the Dutch judiciary becomes active and requests official investigations in the Soviet Union and visas. Hans Knoop and his photographer receive visas, while the Dutch investigation team is still waiting for an answer. Knoop and the photographer do research on site in Podhorodce, photograph the investigations of Soviet forensic experts, and interview a number of witnesses.

Knoop hands over his findings to the Dutch judicial system. Because of the danger of flight, strict secrecy is agreed upon between the officials. On November 15, 1976, Menten is to be arrested, and on November 20, articles are to appear in *De Telegraaf* and in the magazine *Der Stern*. On the night of 15.11.1976, Pieter Menten and his wife flee to Switzerland – following and apparent warned.

The Swiss journalist **Martin A. Walser**, who is part of the research network, discovers him in a hotel near Zurich, where he is then arrested by Swiss police. Since Menten's deeds as a war criminal are considered statute-barred in Switzerland, it is uncertain whether Menten can be extradited to the Netherlands. Finally, he is deported as an "undesirable person" after the Dutch authorities assure that Menten will be tried in the Netherlands and not extradited to Poland.

The trial begins before the Amsterdam Special Court on 9 May 1977 . Menten denies having participated in the murder of Jews. The defense posits Menten as a victim of the Soviet secret service (KGB) and a Jewish conspiracy. Following the testimony of Haviv Kanaan and five eyewitnesses to the shootings in Podhorodce, this defence strategy is doomed to failure. Menten changes gears, now claiming that in 1952, he was promised immunity by Justice **Minister Donker** in return for his silence in a political corruption scandal. Menten is found guilty of the Podhorodce executions by the court on 14 December 1977 and sentenced to **15 years imprisonment**. He is acquitted of other charges (massacre in Urycz) for lack of evidence.

Menton appeals and on 29 May 1978, the High Council of the Netherlands grants his appeal on the grounds that the Special Court had not sufficiently examined Menten's statement that he had been granted immunity from prosecution in 1952. The court sets aside the sentence with reference to the 1952 promise in question and Menten leaves Scheveningen prison a free man on 4 December 1978. This provokes public demonstrations against the release of a convicted war criminal.

The surprising acquittal is invalidated by the High Council in 1979 and the case is transferred to a court in Rotterdam. In this trial, Menten accuses police commissioner Peters, journalist Hans Knoop and all the other investigators and pulls a new joker out of his sleeve, claiming that witnesses confused him with his brother, Dirk. Dirk Menten then testifies in court that Pieter had confessed to his involvement in the shootings as early as 1943. Ten years later, the confession was recorded in writing in the presence of relatives. Menten again claims that the Minister of Justice Donker had assured him immunity, as he claimed to have a secret dossier on the collaboration of high-ranking officials with the Nazis. On 9 May 1980, Menten is finally sentenced by the court in Rotterdam to **ten years in prison and a fine of 100,000 guilders** for his involvement in the Podhorodce murders.

Confiscated parts of his art collection are returned to Menten after the verdict was rendered, since at that time, it could not be proven that the collection was acquired by theft and extortion. Menten serves six years of his prison sentence and is released in 1985. Irish Prime Minister, Garret FitzGerald uses his veto to prevent Menten from moving to his villa in County Waterford, Ireland. Because his estate in Ireland was the site of an arson attack in 1979, Menten obtains **compensation of £37,000 from the Irish state** in 1986. The Federal Republic of Germany, which had paid 550,000 DM to the "Nazi victim" Menten in 1965, asserts **claims for restitution in the amount of 880,000 DM** (the amount originally paid plus interest), and the auction house Sotheby's-Mak van Waay also submits claims for unpaid receivables. In 1985, about 400 paintings and furniture from Menten's collection are auctioned off to satisfy these claims.

On 15.12.1987 Menten dies in a retirement home in Loosdrecht.

Sources: Several Wikipedia articles on Menten - especially the article in the German edition - contain many facts and text passages; Dieter Schenk, Der Lemberger Professorenmord; Smart, Pieter Menten. The „looting Dutchman“, in: <http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/economics/menten.html> ;