

**Sgt Laurens Maria Punt Dutch Army - Bronzen Kruis;
Kruis van Verdienste
Training Name - L. M. Pijnenburg
Field Name - Leo Smit
Code Name - Simon; Squash**



Laurens was born on 13 October 1918 in Alkmaar, North Holland, the son of Henricus Punt and Catharina Punt nee Vader.

Educated in Alkmaar and the Apostolic Boarding School, Montfortans College, Schimmert, Limburg, returning to Alkmaar Laurens was employed by the North Holland Insurance Company. In May 1938 Laurens was called up for Military service in the Dutch Army and, after completing his compulsory service, he volunteered to remain and served as a Sgt with the 21st Defence Troops. Following compulsory demobilisation when the German forces invaded Holland, Laurens was employed as a Customs Officer in Valkenswaard, North Brabant.

In December 1941 Laurens made the decision to try to get to the UK to join the Dutch forces. Travelling via Antwerp, Brussels and Paris to Vichy France, in February 1942 Laurens was imprisoned in Lyon for two months before he was handed to the Dutch Consulate. Whilst awaiting the arrival of his documentation to leave the country, Laurens was employed as a Greek and Latin teacher at a school in La Gimond, Loire. In September 1942 Laurens received his visa and travelled via Madrid and Cadiz before sailing for Curacao. In December 1942 Laurens boarded the MV Empire Spenser, sailing to Liverpool via New York. On 8 December the ship was torpedoed to the SE of Greenland and sank. Laurens made it to the lifeboat and was picked up by ship, arriving in the UK on 14 December.

Travelling to London, Laurens applied for service with SOE (Dutch Section). Following interrogation, in March 1943 Laurens was trained at STS 6 West Court, Berkshire, STS 24 Knoydart, Scotland, STS 51 Ringway, Manchester for parachute training, and STS 61 Audley End, Hertfordshire, before he was allocated to his operation.

At 23:00 on 21 May 1943, together with two other Agents, Laurens departed RAF Tempsford, Bedfordshire in 138 Sqn Halifax BB317 (NF-N).

Successfully dropped at the drop zone near Garderen, Gelderland, the Gestapo were waiting. Unbeknown to SOE, the Germans had infiltrated the Dutch Section and were operating a very successful counterintelligence operation, known as "Englandspiel". Immediately arrested, Laurens was interrogated by the SS and transferred to the SD prison Haaren in North Brabant. Following the escape of prisoners from Haaren on 29 November 1943 the remaining agents, including Laurens, were first transported to the prison in Assen, then in 1944 to Rawicz. Most agents were then transferred to the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. Laurens was executed, along with 22 other SOE agents, on 6 September 1944.

Also Killed: Sgt Oscar Willem de Brey BK KV (Agent/Dutch Army); Sgt Anton Berends Mink BK (Agent/Dutch Army)

Laurens has no known grave and is commemorated on a Memorial Plate at Mauthausen that covers the area where the ashes of all agents killed with Laurens are believed to be buried.

Laurens is commemorated on Wall Panel - Not Yet Erected

Photo Source: brabantsegesneuvelden.nl