

Willem Oltmans

Willem Leonard Oltmans (10 June 1925 – 30 September 2004) was a Dutch **investigative journalist** and author who did not hesitate to pro-actively intervene in international politics.

Due to the highly critical and opposite stance he often took towards Dutch global politics, as of 1956 the Dutch government conspired to keep him out of work. A lengthy lawsuit (1991–2000) involving the **Royal family** led to the state having to pay him damages. An erudite orator, the straightforward and uncompromising Oltmans was a striking character in Dutch society.^[1]

1 Early life

Oltmans was born into a wealthy family with roots in the **Dutch East Indies**. During the Second World War he was a member of the Dutch Resistance. “We blew up a German train,” Oltmans told the Dutch daily *Reformatorisch Dagblad* in 2003^[2] “Hitler called me a terrorist, but I saw myself as a freedom fighter.”

He studied at the prestigious **Nyenrode Business University** (1946) and **Yale University** (1948), without graduating. Originally intent on a career with the diplomatic corps of the foreign service, he ended up working in press offices in the Netherlands (1953–1955). He married in 1955 and worked as a freelance reporter in Rome in 1956. There he befriended Indonesian president **Soekarno**, which started his remarkable career as a controversial journalist.^[1]

Convinced that a well connected and informed individual could play a decisive role in the international political arena, he assumed a pro-active part in global political developments, becoming both a news reporter and news maker.

2 Dutch state conspiracy

Against the will of the Dutch government, Oltmans interviewed Indonesian president **Soekarno** in 1956. Once he became a confidant of Soekarno and part of his inner circle he took it upon himself to convince the broader public in the Netherlands of the legitimacy of Soekarno's viewpoints. In 1957 he pleaded for the transfer of Dutch New Guinea to Indonesia while in Indonesia. He claimed to have prevented a Dutch war against Indonesia over New Guinea by sending a memo to US president Kennedy.

Subsequently **Joseph Luns**, Minister of Foreign Affairs, covertly tried everything to sabotage Oltmans' career, with considerable success: for a long time, Oltmans was forced to live off welfare. Luns who now had become Oltmans' nemesis called him a 'one engine mosquito'. In 1995 Oltmans published his book 'My friend Sukarno'.

He fought a long lawsuit (1991–2000) against the Dutch state, which he eventually won. In 2000 a commission awarded him eight million guilders (four million dollars) in damages, after taxes. Having paid two million guilders in lawyer's fees, Oltmans bought a penthouse on a canal in Amsterdam and a Steinway piano.

3 Kennedy conspiracy

Oltmans was based in the USA in the 1960s, where he worked as a reporter for Dutch TV broadcaster **NOS** and established ties to President **Kennedy's** closest circle of advisors.^[1] After Kennedy was assassinated in **Dallas** in 1963, Oltmans interviewed the mother of accused assassin **Lee Harvey Oswald**, Marguerite. Further investigation led him to Oswald's acquaintance **Baron George de Mohrenschildt**. According to Oltmans, De Mohrenschildt, who had ties to the **CIA**, was the architect behind the killing. In 1977 De Mohrenschildt agreed to disclose information to Oltmans, but disappeared from their meeting place and was found dead in Florida a few weeks later.^[3] His death was declared a suicide.

On April 2, 1977 Willem Oltmans told the **House Select Committee on Assassinations** that **George de Mohrenschildt** had implicated himself in the conspiracy to kill President Kennedy. And **Pat S. Russell**, who was De Mohrenschildt's attorney said “I definitely feel there was a conspiracy and that definitely was the opinion of George.”^[4] De Mohrenschildt, whom the **HSCA** considered to be a “crucial witness” and had died four days prior.^[5] Oltmans testified for three hours behind closed doors and told the committee that De Mohrenschildt told him he had discussed the assassination of Kennedy with **Lee Harvey Oswald** from A to Z. “De Mohrenschildt told me that Oswald acted at his (De Mohrenschildt's) instructions and that he knew Oswald was going to kill Kennedy,” Oltmans said.^[6] Although Oltmans had given information to the Committee shortly before, De Mohrenschildt's death had released Oltmans from his promise not to divulge certain information. Oltmans revealed that De Mohrenschildt, whom he had known for ten years, had told him that there had been a conspiracy to assassinate Kennedy and that he



Willem Oltmans during his last public performance at the Universiteit Maastricht (22 April 2004)

had played a role in the conspiracy. De Mohrenschildt said that CIA and FBI personnel were involved as well.^[7]

Intent on irony, Oltmans played the role of De Mohrenschildt in Oliver Stone's 1991 film about the assassination, *JFK*.^[8]

4 Oltmans in the Soviet Union

In the eighties Oltmans endeavoured to create a more balanced opinion in the West about the Soviet Union. Looking for a more poised perspective on the one sided bad image of the evil empire's communist power he often traveled to Russia. Together with the Kremlin's foreign expert Georgi Arbatov he wrote the book 'The Soviet position' elaborating on Moscow's perspective on the East-West issues in 1981. The book received much attention and was published in several languages.^[1]

5 Oltmans in Suriname

In the eighties Oltmans also actively interfered with the post-colonial Dutch-Suriname relationship. He recognised a bilateral relationship based in negative sentiments similar to the Dutch-Indonesian relationship. Intend on playing a mediating role Oltmans traveled to Suriname to interview military dictator Bouterse. He published a book that was banned in Suriname and misunderstood in the Netherlands.^[1]

6 Oltmans in South Africa

Due to the ban imposed on him by Minister Luns, Oltmans was forced to help support himself through his family's inheritance; the death of his parents (1966 and 1974) and some bad investments caused him financial difficulty. In the late eighties he intended to use his large global network as a consultant to introduce entrepreneurs to Eastern European business opportunities. Through a string of quarrels with his stakeholders this initiative failed completely and Oltmans left for South Africa.^[1]

Both his brothers had settled in South Africa in 1948. He had visited the country regularly and in 1990 decided to settle there permanently. In South Africa he continued his tendency of actively intervening in local politics. His investigative reporting was not appreciated by the shaky South African regime of the time and in August 1992 he was deported on charges of espionage. Oltmans always insisted the Dutch Security Service was involved in his deportation.^[1]

7 Publications (selection)

- *Persona Non Grata* (Papieren Tijger, Breda, 1994) ISBN 978-90-6728-081-5
- *Mijn vriend Sukarno* (Spectrum, Utrecht, 1995) ISBN 90-274-4762-4
- *De staat van bedrog* (Papieren Tijger, Breda, 1998) ISBN 978-90-6728-095-2
- *Cry for war* (Papieren Tijger, Breda, 2003) ISBN 978-90-6728-151-5
- *Laatste wapenfeiten* (Papieren Tijger, Breda, 2009) ISBN 978-90-6728-239-0

8 References

Notes & citations

- [1] "Biography at the 'Netherlands Institute of History' (ING)". Inghist.nl. Retrieved 26 March 2012.

- [2] de Wreede, Jaap (24 May 2003). "Publicist Willem Oltmans kan het dwarsliggen niet laten". *Reformatorisch Dagblad*. Digibron.nl. Retrieved 26 March 2012.
- [3] "Oltmans, Willem ""Reportage over de Kennedy-moordenaars."" (1977)". Boekenroute.nl. 30 April 1990. Retrieved 26 March 2012.
- [4] "Lawyer Says Texan Told Him Oswald Had Aid in '63 Plot", The New York Times, April 3, 1977"
- [5] Summers, Anthony (1998). *Not in Your Lifetime*. New York: Marlowe & Company. p. 369. ISBN 1-56924-739-0.
- [6] "Journalist tells of JFK Plots", The Ledger (Lakeland, Florida), April 4, 1977"
- [7] Lane, Mark (November 1977). "The Mysterious Death of a Key JFK Witness". Gallery Magazine.
- [8] "Article about Oltmans cameo in the movie on the JFK website". Jfk-online.com. Retrieved 26 March 2012.

Bibliography

- Oltmans, Willem "*Mijn vriend Sukarno*" (Spectrum, Utrecht, 1995) ISBN 90-274-4762-4
- Oden, Edwin "*De man van acht miljoen*" (Balans, Amsterdam, 2010) ISBN 978-94-6003-283-7

9 External links

- Various works - Digital Library of Dutch Literature
- Willem Oltmans, The Eight Million Dollar Man – Documentary
- Jaap de Wreede, 'Publicist Willem Oltmans kan het dwarsliggen niet laten', In: *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, 24 May 2003
- Biography – Dutch Institute of Netherlands history
- National Library of the Netherlands Official website
- Online dossier – National library of Netherlands.
- Online selection of essays.
- Online selection of TV interviews.
- Online portrait by newspaper 'de Volkskrant'.

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