

# *The Eiffel Tower Gang*

## Chapter 3

### **The BlueMill**

In January, 1978, Jan van Klamperen, professor of nuclear engineering for three decades at the Technical University in Eindhoven, Holland, sank his life's savings into the purchase and reconstruction of a quaint, olden-style Dutch windmill. Located in neighboring Nuenen, this windmill may be seen in some of the early drawings of former resident Vincent van Gogh. A note of caution: it ought not be confused with the other windmill in Nuenen, that also appears in his drawings from this period .<sup>1</sup>

Seen from a distance the mill brought up the image of a giant chess rook. The grassy mound on which it stood raised it several meters above the level ground. Window slits had been carved out at unusual places. Before van Klamperen painted over its dull red brick facade in a uniform China blue, it had been decorated with white stripes around its base and midriff. The mill's dominance of the largely barren landscape was considerably amplified by 4 large and sleek slender vanes, their propeller blades set at right angles one to another and slightly scooped along their edges in the shape of parabolic hollows.

---

<sup>1</sup>The one cited in this account may be seen on page 203 ( F1324) of the monumental art reproduction project of Jan Hulsker : "van Gogh en zijn weg"; 1978

Sparrows and sea-gulls, rarities in these dismal flatlands, played about them on bright sunny days. Apart from the macadam road of half a kilometer that had been laid down under van Klamperen's supervision and connected with a dirt path through the fields, the Mill was surrounded only by pasture land reeking of fertilizer, and untillable soil criss-crossed by power lines.

At the time of the events about to be related at great length, at considerable length, perhaps too much length .... Dr Jan van Klamperen was a seedy and sedentary don in his mid-fifties, acknowledged as a competent teacher but, in the opinion of his colleagues, a scientist of little ability, a view which he did not share. Since the early 80's he'd been using the Blue Mill as a laboratory for cosmic ray research. His lonely, Herculean labors had begun paying dividends around 1986. Now it was his belief that he stood on the verge of discoveries in particle physics that would shake the scientific world.

van Klamperen had always been frail and underweight. He ate but little, rarely drank anything but light Belgian beer, never did any physical exercise apart from his work at the laboratory, which however was quite strenuous for a man of his age. He smoked like a chimney, compulsively generating the cigarettes on a hand roller from Dutch *zwane shag* loose tobacco. High-strung, pensive, slightly cranky, mild-mannered in language, voice and gesture, never known to give way to an impulse to physical violence, van Klamperen

was, all the same, capable of acting with complete ruthlessness when the occasion arose.

Over the last decade his weekly schedule had crystallized into an inflexible routine. His teaching duties at the Technical University went from Tuesday to Friday. This gave him 3-day weekend for his other activities. Saturday mornings he arose punctually at 5 AM . Taking nothing more than a hastily consumed glass of orange juice and a roll, he left his condominium in Eindhoven to bicycle the 5 kilometers to Nuenen. He generally crossed the Eisenhowerweg highway at 5:45 . A succession of shortcuts over fields and marshes brought him to the entrance to the grounds of the Mill in the neighborhood of 6.

Among the major renovations of the Mill was a semi-spherical transparent plexiglass observatory bubble. Completely covering the flat roof, its installation had cost him as much again as the building itself . The mill's vanes had been covered with translucent stripes on which were streaked many fine spectral lines. The vanes could be turned by a motor sensitive to precise gradations of speed, putting at his disposal a precision instrument for the analysis of the spectra of incoming cosmic rays.

The complicated ritual of opening the door of the Mill took around half an hour. First five keys were applied to as many locks. This done , van Klamperen walked to a shed located about 10 meters away . There he'd installed a small home computer. The monitor was activated, several programs

booted up. Once the system was warmed up the day's password was entered on the keyboard: a paragraph in English taken from *Alice in Wonderland* . Week by week the password advanced through the novel; in 8 years he'd gone through 390 paragraphs. In anticipation of the day when *Alice* would be finished, a *War and Peace* lay in readiness on a shelf above his bedstead. van Klamperen had picked up a reading command of Russian from his 3 year research fellowship at a high energy physics research institute in Minsk.

After typing in the password van Klamperen returned to the Mill. He inserted two more keys and the door sprang open. Like his colleagues everywhere van Klamperen was extremely absent-minded. It was not unusual for him to forget either his keys, his copy of *Alice* , or both . This necessitated a return trip to his apartment. Consequently, although he always arose punctually at 5 AM, it was not unusual for him to be unable to get into the Blue Mill before 8.

With the door opened he could at last roll his bicycle up the grassy mound into the building. Throwing a lever shut the door as securely as it had been before his arrival; then he locked the door behind him.

His first stop was the small kitchen on the ground floor, where he put together a breakfast large enough to carry him to the middle of the day. Another 6 hours of labor awaited him before he could, at last, permit himself the keen delight

of climbing the winding staircase to the observatory and its magnificent collection of astrophysical instruments, many of them of his own original design and manufacture.

After a rest of perhaps half an hour, van Klamperen returned to the front room to roll up a threadbare carpet covering the floor. Underneath it lay a trapdoor to which a leather strap was attached. Opening it, he clattered down a ladder resting on the packed earth of the basement floor.

The room in which he found himself was filled with boxes tossed in random disorder. These boxes were of three kinds. The first kind, delivered via a complicated route that originated in Taipei and went through a dozen countries, held many thousands of miniature souvenir Eiffel Towers, roughly the size of large paper clips. The second were crammed with square tin salt-shakers ordered from a salt-shaker factory in Breda . Under the beam of a powerful spotlight van Klamperen, using a flour scoop, worked for 5 hours , filling the saltshakers with the tiny Eiffel Towers, then repacking them into the remaining boxes, which were much bigger than the others. When finished, he'd packed 20,000 Eiffel Tower souvenirs into 800 salt-shakers.

Another two hours were spent taping, labeling and addressing the stuffed boxes. Having completed his morning tasks, he was now free to prepare himself a lunch and attend to what, for him, was the real function of the Mill: 16 uninterrupted hours in the observatory devoted to research in  $\pi^-$  and  $\mu^-$  meson scattering in the upper atmosphere.

Apart from a brief nap and moderate dinner, this work occupied him until well past midnight .

At 4 AM Sunday morning Dr. Jan van Klamperen descended back into the basement. The twenty or so cartons were carried upstairs, out the door, and piled into a cart which he attached to the back wheel of his bicycle . As the protocol for securing and locking the Blue Mill was as protracted and tedious as that used in opening it, he was never ready to begin the journey through the empty Sunday morning streets of bourgeois Nuenen until 6 AM. The boxes were pedaled to the Eindhoven train station and left to be picked up by the 7:30 AM train to Rosendaal.

Having completely and unimaginably taxing weekend devoted in the service of his two driving ambitions, money and fame, the eminent Doctor Professor Jan van Klamperen attached his bicycle to the top of his car parked in the train station parking lot, and drove home. A kiss to his wife and wave of the hand to his two school-age children , then straight to bed, from which he did not arise until supper time . It was quite agreeable to him that his wife and children should go to church without him : Science was his church.

It ought to be noted at this point that although his activities constituted an essential link in the illegal operations of an international smuggling ring, in the performance of which he violated several fine points of Dutch law, van Klamperen was confident in the knowledge that the government would never assemble enough

information to make a case against him. Shrewd, painstaking and infinitely clever, he'd covered his bases well.

On a day between Monday and Thursday of the following week two Dutch businessmen ( of aspect so anonymous that, even after a weekly routine that had not varied over 10 years the stationmaster could not have identified them with any certainty ) drove up to the Rosendaal station and collected the boxes. On Thursday afternoon they were smuggled across the Belgian border by an English couple well known to the border patrols. They had been driving their antiquated Rolls-Royce up and down the local roads at all hours of the day and night for 20 years, and no-one paid any attention to them.

The rest of the operation may be briefly summarized. The boxes were flown out from the Brussels airport on a private plane and delivered to the Spanish island of Majorca. Here they were taken on board the yacht of a backward, corrupted and obscenely rich Texas playboy named Arthur Hodges. Unloading the souvenirs from the salt-shakers was directed by Hodges' Taiwanese wife, the beautiful and ruthless Mei Tay , sister of the leader of the Eiffel Tower Gang and manager of the factory in Taiwan that manufactured the contraband souvenirs : Low Bing.

The salt-shakers were shipped to a clandestine factory in the neighborhood of Vichy where low quality monosodium glutamate was manufactured. They were filled

to the brim with the bogus meat tenderizer in preparation for re-smuggling back to Taiwan.

Eventually the Eiffel Tower souvenirs were loaded onto Arthur Hodges yacht, the *Dallas Star* , and transported to Cannes, from whence they were driven along the Riviera to a warehouse up in the mountains north of the resort town of Theoule-sur-Mer . Apart from a small percentage delivered other French cities, it was from this central location that this contraband was expedited to Paris, finding its their way onto the shelves of every souvenir shop every Tabac, every newsstand and bookstore of the City of Light.

*A nifty two-way operation, mediated by salt shakers : Eiffel Tower souvenirs from Taiwan to France; monosodium glutamate in the reverse direction .*

van Klamperen was personally responsible for expediting around a million souvenirs each year. He also directed the combined activities of 20 other operatives in neighboring countries.