



Newsletter

Winter 2024

RCL 005 Branch Liberation of the
Netherlands

2024-10



The Board wishes you all a very happy new year and we look forward to seeing many of you at the New Year's Reception on Sunday, January 19th at Clubhouse Mondani!

A Very Special Year

As you are all no doubt aware, this is a very special year. 2025 marks the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, in May on the continent of Europe, and worldwide in August.

As a Canadian who has not personally served in the military, it is incredibly hard to imagine how difficult it must have been for my great uncles who fought with the Canadian Army, facing bullets, shellfire, mortars, rain, and mud. Facing a fear that, thankfully, to most of us is unfathomable. I think of their wives back home in Canada, safe, but terrified that their husbands may not come home. I think of these uncles who all did make it home, though a little worse for wear.

Then I think of my husband's family who lived in Arnhem when war broke out. His grandparents who were young children or young adults and had to live under Nazi rule for 5 long years. His uncle who was a young boy of 4 years, hiding in his basement in Oosterbeek in September 1944. I think of his grandmother who told stories of being several centimeters taller once she arrived in Friesland after being evacuated from Arnhem (snow under her clogs!).

What must they have felt when they finally got to come home in August, 1945? What of the Dutch who were able to stay in their homes, but their cities were ruined, their neighbours gone, and so very little to eat. How did that freedom feel? There was still so far to go until life could return to 'normal'.

This year, I hope for us all that we will take some time to think of what this freedom means to us. And to think of what this freedom we enjoy cost so many.

Though I am not Dutch, I admit to feeling a little Dutch pride each year when people all over come to remember the soldiers and heroes on Remembrance Sunday and Remembrance Day. And I feel it even more so every Christmas Eve when thousands of people flock to the war cemeteries around the country and show their respect, gratitude, and admiration by placing candles on the graves.

These men are not forgotten and it is our job as the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 005 'Liberation of the Netherlands' to ensure that they never will be.

It is an honour to serve the legacy of the Canadians who came across the ocean to save nations, to save families, and to save children, sometimes at the cost of their own lives.

My wish for this year is that we all remember, that we teach our children to remember, and that we serve, not for ourselves or our glory, but for theirs.

Amanda Slotboom
Treasurer/
Editor





Since the Armistice was signed into effect on November 11, 1918 at 11:00 am, the Commonwealth states have recognised the anniversary of the end of a bloody and horrific four years of war, taking the time to honour those service members who died in the line of duty. Since that time, several other non-Commonwealth countries also observe the 11th of November, recognising the end of the hostilities.

Armistice Day was officially changed to be recognised in Canada as Remembrance Day in 1931.

In the Netherlands, Remembrance Day is recognised on May 4th, the day before the end of the Nazi Occupation in WWII. However, as the Dutch have never forgotten the sacrifices and bravery of the Allied soldiers who came to liberate this nation, many attend ceremonies on the weekend nearest November 11th, or on the 11th itself, at various Commonwealth War Cemeteries and monuments around the country.

Groesbeek

Every year at Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, the Canadian Forces Support Unit from Geilenkirchen, Germany holds a 'Remembrance Ceremony.' And based on our objectives, it is customary for RCL Branch 005 to play an active role in this.

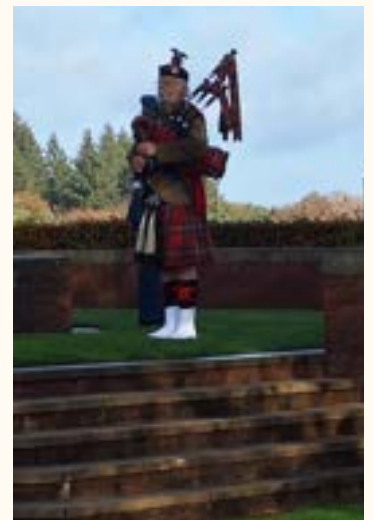
On Monday, November 11, 2024, the weather was mild, fresh, and beautifully sunny. Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Alma Pleasance, and Unit Sergeant Major, Chief Warrant Officer Samuel Pepin were impressed by our promotion tent, manned by comrade Ruud Jansen. They were also pleased by the turn out of branch members, military, and local civilians.



The ceremony began once the Colour Party had marched, preceded by the Piper of the 48th Highlanders of Holland, and had positioned themselves at the Cross of Sacrifice. The ceremony began with O' Canada and the Wilhelmus, followed by the Padre's speech. The "Last Post", two minutes of silence, the lament and the "Reville" were then played. The Act of Remembrance was read by comrade Gerrit Bruggink. The poem 'In Flanders' Fields' was read by three students of AFNORTH, and then Lt. Col. Pleasance also gave a short speech.

Comrades Danny Murphy and Gerrit Bruggink laid a wreath on behalf of the branch and comrade Alice van Bekkum laid a wreath on behalf of Faces to Graves. The piper played "Amazing Grace," and the ceremony was concluded with the God Save the King.

Once the Colour Party marched off, all guests were invited to warm up with a hot chocolate, cookies and soup at the catering tent, organised by comrade Yvonne Swarthoff and Ans Mostert (wife of comrade Henk Mostert), courtesy of the Canadian Forces Support Unit.



Other Ceremonies

Remembrance Day was not only recognised in Groesbeek, but also in several places around the Netherlands. Comrades Henk Mostert (laid wreath), Amanda and Maikel Slotboom were present in Harderwijk on Saturday the 9th. On Sunday the 10th, comrades Don Paauwe and Hans Achterkamp were present in Westduin and Apeldoorn (Man with the Two Hats), and comrade Amanda laid a wreath together with comrade Jim Brotherton (on behalf of the American Legion) at the Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery. Members were also present in Rotterdam and Rees (Germany *see Gerrit's story).

Commemorations were also held at Vimy Ridge and Beaumont Hamel in France.

The Board thanks all members who were present, laid a wreath, were part of a delegation, or volunteered throughout this year's Poppy Campaign.





Poppy Campaign

Contributed by: Gerrit Bruggink

The Poppy Campaign began in Bronckhorst by pinning a poppy on Mayor Marja van der Tas on November 4th. She received the poppy with respect and asked why we do this in the Netherlands and what it means. She took plenty of time to hear my story.

Ms. Van der Tas was also awarded the Liberation Coin, as her time as Mayor is coming to an end.

During the campaign period, the poppies were made available in various places around the Netherlands (photos below).

Throughout the year, we pay attention to the poppy, its origin, its purpose, and why we wear it at various commemorations and events (including Keep Them Rolling and more).

Education was shared about the symbolic flower starting on June 4th in Normandy during the D-Day commemorations, and the last on Remembrance Day.

Camp Rees Commemoration

During the commemoration at Camp Rees on November 9th, there was an opportunity to pin the poppy on the Mayor of Rees, Mr. Sebastian Hense.

During the war, from 1944-45, Rees was home to a concentration camp. Although the security was strict and the sanctions for 'aid to the enemy' were severe, local residents, including from the village of Bienen, managed to provide help from outside in the form of food and clothing.

From December 1944 onwards, the first prisoners managed to escape via Megchelen in the direction of Gaanderen.

They were given shelter in the Netherlands by the Venhorst family, who then set up an underground network to guide prisoners after their escape. The total number of successful breakaways is not known exactly.

On March 23, 1945, shortly after Operation Veritable, with the battle of the Reichswald, Rees was bombed to the ground by the British and the Scots (51st (Highland) Infantry Division). Two days later, on the 25th at 12:00, the camp was liberated and the Germans who were still present were taken prisoner.

A tent camp was set up for the prisoners. The survivors among the Dutch were eventually returned to their places of origin via Kevelaer, which had already been taken a little earlier.

I would like to thank all of our poppy volunteers for their efforts.



Bronckhorst Mayor,
Ms. Marja van der Tas



Rees Mayor,
Mr. Sebastian Hense



Concentration Camp Wees



Photos at Blokker Zelhem and Snackbar Hoogstraat,
Hengelo, Gelderland



Christmas Eve 2024

Candles are placed by the grateful Dutch population on the graves of their Liberators

According to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission: The Finnish tradition of placing candles on the graves of loved ones as an integral part of Christmas Eve was introduced to Holten Canadian War Cemetery in 1991 by Mrs. Leena van Dam, a Finnish lady living in the Netherlands. Since then, the candles have lit the graves of the Commonwealth servicemen at Holten and other Commonwealth War Graves around the country.

This year, members of our branch were far and wide, remembering these brave men who died liberating the Netherlands 80 years ago. Below you will find a selection of photos from many of these locations.

Roosendaal Area

Comrades Daan Bruggelmans and Dré van Roomen, on behalf of the Dutch Polar Bears, were at the cemeteries at the Bachlaan and Bredaseweg to place candles for all victims of WWII. Four personal stories were also shared with the visitors and the Last Post was played. Students played a special part in these services, placing decorated candles and drawings on the graves and remembering the lesson that our freedom is not to be taken for granted.



Wilnis

Courtesy of Comrade Reinier Groeneveld

Three Canadians are buried here. Reiner goes alone or with his daughter, Suzanne. It is a peaceful and quiet place for reflection.



Groesbeek van Tjarco Schuurman



Holten

Comrade Wim Poppenk



Ugchelen

Comrade Henk Mostert and Ans Mostert

Interested public gathered at 16:15 in the parking lot of Heidehof. Accompanied by a bagpipe player, they walked towards the war graves of Heidehof, Ugchelen, listening to the call of the midwinter horn blowers. The last part of the walk was done silently, in remembrance, so that we do not forget how bad war is and what freedom means. After the Last Post had sounded, those present, particularly the school children, were invited to place a candle at the 57 graves. It was a beautiful ceremony that was also very much appreciated by the overseas families.



Arnhem/Oosterbeek

Comrades Amanda and Maikel Slotboom have started a family tradition of attending Oosterbeek each year on Christmas Eve with their daughter, Katie (13), not only placing candles at graves, but taking photos of the graves of family members who have asked, often spending up to two hours, rain or shine, around the cemetery. In 2021, with COVID restrictions still in place, more than 60 families requested photos. This year, another 47 were in touch and received individual photos.



Katie and her friend Valentijn (13) came back on December 27th to help clean up the cemetery.

Lochem and Barchem

Comrades Berry and Yvonne Swarthoff



Bergen op Zoom

Comrade Ad van Uffelen reported that several hundred people, young and old, came to the war cemeteries in Bergen op Zoom on Christmas Eve to honour their Canadian liberators buried there.

Hand in hand, veterans and young children entered the cemetery to place the lights on the graves. The organisation was honoured by the presence of the Honourable Huge Adsett, Canadian Ambassador to the Netherlands. As a representative of Canada, he commemorated the Canadian liberators in a special way by placing a few lights. Comrades Don Paauwe and Ad van Uffelen were present on behalf of the RCL005.



Jonkerbos (Comrade Richard Hendriks)

On December 24th, the annual light show took place at the Jonkerbos Nijmegen Military Cemetery, with 1652 carved candles placed. While this cemetery contains mostly British soldiers, nearly 100 Canadians are also resting here. Mayor Bruls of Nijmegen, and Aldermen Mr. JP Broeren and Mr. T v Elferen, were also present. Mayor Bruls lit the torch of Remembrance (provided by the organization IOFF of Mr. Peter van der Meij) and lit the first candle together with 2 children Sofie and Ties from the Sint Nicolaasschool, Nijmegen. The aldermen placed a candle at the grave of British soldier Wats who would have had his birthday on December 25th, and a candle at the grave of British soldier Ellis. She did this together with Fenna and Eva, also from the Sint Nicolaasschool.

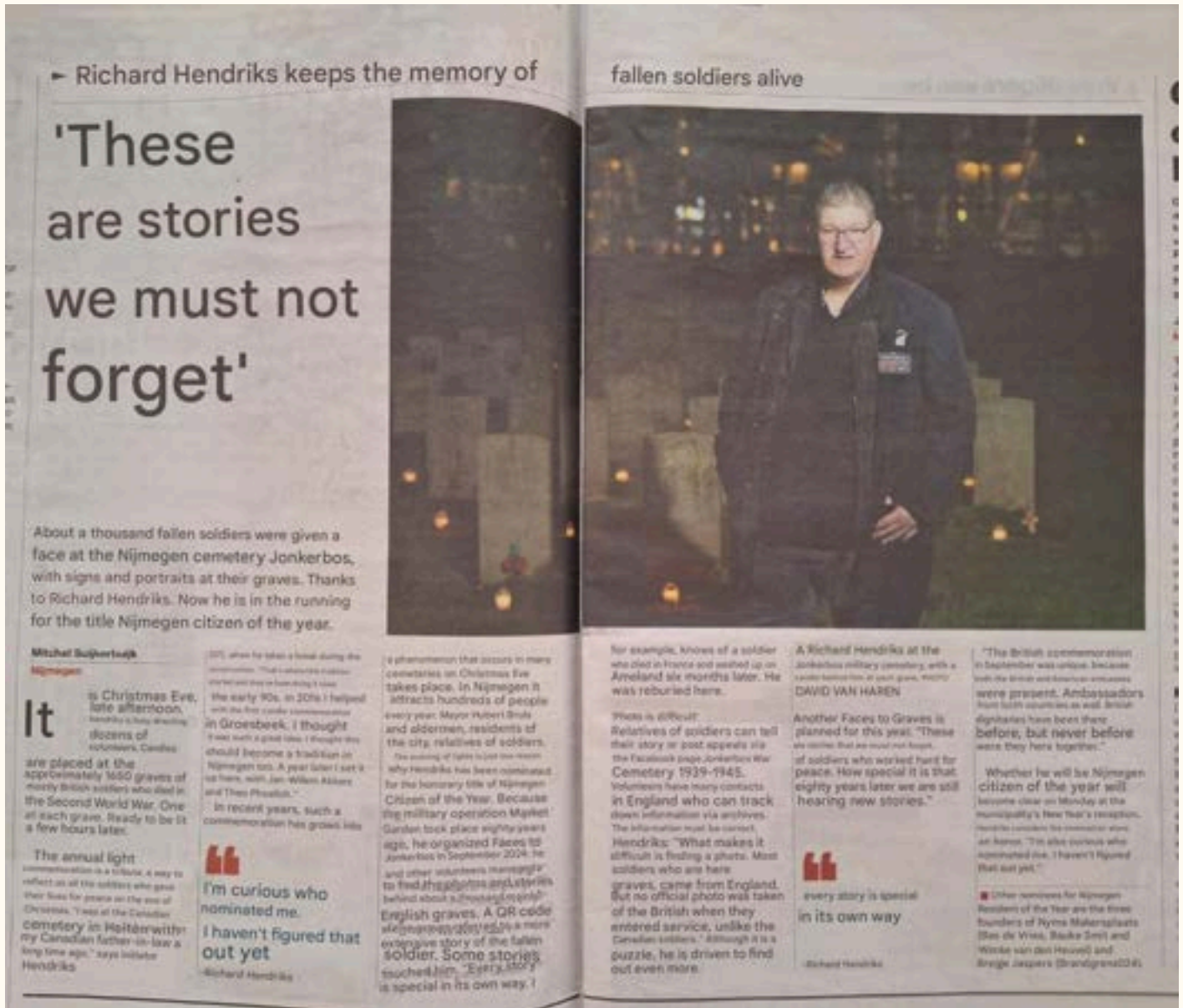
A student from the Tarcisiuschool Nijmegen, Herman v.d Water, played Amazing Grace on his hurdy-gurdy; a beautiful instrument. Mr. Schreef played the Last Post and comrade Danny Murphy recited the Act of Remembrance. The ceremony was musically supported by Brass Quintet BBQ and was organised by Lichtjes op Jonkerbos Nijmegen. Volunteers included our comrades Danny Murphy, Henk van den Boom and Richard Hendriks. All in all, this was a very successful Christmas Eve!

Photos courtesy of Lichtjes op [Oorlogsbegraafplaats Jonkerbos Facebook Page](#)



A special note about Comrade Hendriks

Richard has been nominated anonymously for Nijmegen Citizen of the Year for his hard work at Jonkerbos and remembering the men who lay there. On Christmas Eve 1652 graves were lit by candles. Richard is also hard at work with Faces to Jonkerbos, beginning in September 2024, putting faces and stories to about 1000 (mainly English) graves, using a QR code at the graves themselves.



Gelderlander, January 4, 2025





For those who didn't come home for Christmas

Candles on War Graves

Candles were lit throughout the Netherlands on Christmas Eve for those who did not come back for Christmas. For those who fought for our freedom and let us live. It all seems so clear, but liberty is no longer guaranteed in this day and age.

Many are now fighting again. Thousands of soldiers are stationed in Europe to guard our freedom; they didn't get to go home for Christmas either.

We are seeing that the number of volunteers is increasing to support us in placing the candles. This, the 10th year, the tally is at 482 locations, 25,740 graves and 213 monuments being recognised and remembered. There are also many locations that were not registered, but where candles were lit.



In this year, 2025, we will all celebrate the 80th year of liberation. Please help us ensure that all locations where a candle is lit for a soldier or war victim are made known.

Our motto remains, "***No grave will be forgotten.***"

The turnout on Christmas Eve was enormous at the large cemeteries around the Netherlands, with some locations needing traffic controllers to guide traffic in the right direction.

At Holten, the cars were parked up to the restaurant on the Holterberg.

In Bronckhorst and beyond, all graves were again provided with a candle.

It was not only the soldiers who were remembered. Monuments and graves of resistance people were also provided with a candle.

In Hengelo, the World Peace Flame was not forgotten, with an important message: A Flame, A dream, Living together in Peace is our wish."



The monument in Zelhem, which was unveiled this year on September 23 as a tribute to the crew members of the Lancaster EB470, was lit.

In Groesbeek, an extra candle was placed at Aubrey Cosens' Victoria Cross, and in Steenderen at Lieutenant John Gordon Kavanagh, both of whom were from The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada who also liberated our region.

Candles were also set outside the Netherlands. (See [here](#))

In Normandy, a candle was placed at three locations by friends of mine.

I would like to thank all volunteers for their efforts on Christmas Eve, there were more than a thousand this year.

If you have seen a grave that was not provided with a candle, please let me know. I can be reached at: thb-support@hotmail.nl.

Gerrit Bruggink
1st Vice President

Coming Up



Sunday, January 19 @ 1:00 pm

New Year's Reception @
Clubhouse Mondani

[Graaf Ottoweg 6, Lochem](#)



Operation VERITABLE

Saturday, February 8th

Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery

[Zevenheuvelenweg 38, 6561 ES Groesbeek](#)



Thank you for your patience!

Our website is being moved to a new server, which has caused some irregularity in service. This will be rectified soon.

The layout and content of the website will be updated and modernised in the coming months.

Your patience is appreciated!

Find us online:



Please support our Branch

All donations are appreciated and always welcome. We have ANBI status. All donations qualify for a tax deduction. Please visit the link to our website above.