



Autumn 2024 RCL 005 Branch Liberation of the
Netherlands

2024-09

Dear Members, Future Members, and Friends,

This newsletter will be the last edition of the year. Our editors have again collected articles and stories to apprise you of what has taken place in the past two months regarding remembrance, commemorations and relevant background information.

When I look back at this year 2024, I feel like this year and summer were very, very short. We had a lot of rain in the spring and a late start to the summer.

We now leave the weather behind us and move on to somethings that we can influence.

Attending Commemorations with our Colour Party and Delegations



The last week of October is, in my opinion, the busiest with the annual Commemorations in Zeeland and North Brabant.

To give you an idea, we attended the unveiling of a monument on the 24th in Woensdrecht, and on the 25th, a ceremony on the laying of flowers on Thaliaplein in Bergen op Zoom. There was also a Commemoration on the 25th at the British Cemetery, on the 26th at the Sloedam, and on the 26th in Vlissingen, as well as at the Uncle Beach Memorial, with a commemoration in the Grote of Sint-Jacobskerk beforehand. On the 26th was also a Liberation parade in Bergen op Zoom. Finally, on the 27th, a Commemoration took place at the Canadian cemetery in Bergen op Zoom.

We saw many representatives present from various countries, as well as interested general public and holidaymakers who took the opportunity to experience the Commemorations.



Of course, this area of the Netherlands has been liberated for 80 years now and it was wonderful to see how many took the opportunity to be present and honor those who fought for our freedom and made the greatest sacrifice. We will continue to commemorate them.

Speaking of that honour, at the Commemoration on the Sloedam, school children were present to bring the wreaths. For many, this took some getting used to, and you could clearly see that.

Afterwards, I spoke briefly with one of the young people, asking, "what did you think of it?".

"Well, it was nice," was the answer. I asked again, "but why are you doing this?". The reply "because they asked...". Eventually the youngsters shared it was "because we must not forget."

The commitment of the youth is very important, because they are our future, and they have to tell the story.

We must reflect and realise that everyday is one day less to commemorate and remember the brave souls who fought for us, and it is our task to remember and tell their stories, so they are not forgotten.



Let's take a look at The Poppy Campaign of 2024

Every year, from the last Friday of October to November 11, many wear a Poppy as a visual reminder to honour Canadian veterans and remember those who sacrificed for our freedom.

The Poppy is distributed in various places in the Netherlands and abroad for a donation. The proceeds are then transferred to the Poppy Fund in Canada and distributed to those veterans who need help.

The poppy can be worn by everyone, on the right side, over their heart.

For more information, you can always contact the Board, or send a message to info@rccl.org.

Further information about the commemorations and note-worthy events will be brought to the attention of the editors.

More information can also be found on our website, www.rccl005.nl.

Regards,

Your Vice President

Gerrit Bruggink





Operation Market Garden 80 Years Later

Written by: Amanda Slotboom

Arnhem/Oosterbeek was buzzing and filled to capacity with military, veterans, descendants, and visitors from around the world during Airborne Week (September 16 to 22nd). While Market Garden was largely a British and American operation, in the Arnhem area, the Canadians played their role as CANLOAN Officers aboard the gliders which landed in Wolfheze and as the Engineers who piloted small boats, aiding in the retreat of the encircled British at Oosterbeek, during Operation Berlin.



Throughout the week, various commemorations were held. On Monday, September 16, 2024, seven veterans, ranging in age from 99 to 103, from Canada, Poland, Great Britain, the United States, and the Netherlands visited the Canadian Cemetery in Groesbeek at the invitation of the Commander of the Royal Netherlands Army.

Following a brief ceremony with speeches from the mayor of Berg en Dal and the chairman of the Faces to Graves Foundation, wreaths were laid at the 'Stone of Remembrance.' The veterans, joined by primary school students, then proceeded to various graves to lay flowers. A special moment followed at Big Canoe's grave, where First Nation students from Saskatchewan laid sunflowers on his grave.



At the annual commemoration of Operation Market Garden on Tuesday, September 17, a wreath was laid at the General Gavin monument in Groesbeek by comrade Danny Murphy on behalf of RCL Branch 005. A delegation also attended a ceremony in Mook on Wednesday.

That same day, the Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery saw the re-interment of two British soldiers who had been found in recent years: Lieutenant Bernard Anderson of the Glider Pilot Regiment and Private Henry Moon of the Green Howards. Additionally, on Friday, the ashes of two Arnhem veterans were laid to rest.

Saturday, September 21st saw several RCL members present at the Engineer's Monument in Driel. After a welcome from Robin Ammerlaan, comrade Mark Veldhuis spoke about YouCee 2024 (YOUTH Conference commEmoration across bordErs), where students from Poland, Germany, Canada, and the Netherlands come together to commemorate the Second World War, and particularly the Battle of Arnhem. The students shared life stories and recited a poem.

Wreaths were laid by representatives from the British embassy, the Canadian ambassador, the Canadian Military Attaché, and numerous other organisations connected to Operation Market Garden. Representing RCL Branch 005, Danny Murphy and Wim Poppenk laid a wreath, while Comrade Alice van Bekkum had the honour of placing the final tribute: a "boat" of seven roses in memory of the seven Royal Canadian Engineers who lost their lives in the operation. The ceremony concluded with the playing of the Last Post, followed by a minute of silence and the Reveille.



The week's events culminated with the Memorial Service at the Arnhem-Oosterbeek Canadian War Cemetery on Sunday morning. Clergy from the United Kingdom, Poland, and the Netherlands opened the service, followed by a Biblical reading by Her Royal Highness, The Princess Royal, Princess Anne. The Princess and clergy were led into the cemetery, accompanied by the Pegasus Pipes and Drums, the British Band Catterick, and a large contingent of standard bearers from the RCL (carried by Comrade Hans Achterkamp), the Royal British Legion, the Polish Parachute Brigade, the Parachute Regiment Association, and others. Numerous wreaths were laid, including one by Comrade Wim Poppenk on behalf of our Branch.

A most memorable moment was, of course, seeing the Flower Children, who held their flowers up high, then turned to the gravestones, softly whispering the soldiers' names, and laying the flowers in remembrance, ensuring every man's name was spoken by a grateful child.

Following the Act of Remembrance, Last Post, two minutes of silence, and the Reveille, the service concluded with a blessing, the national anthems of Great Britain, Poland, and the Netherlands, and a fly by of the Royal Netherlands Airforce Historic Flight.





Photos courtesy of: Arjan Vrieze,
Daan van Oort and Anneke Poppenk



PROMOTION FOR THE ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION BRANCH 005 ON THE GINKELSE HEIDE

Written by Comrade Ruud Janssen
Photos courtesy of: Daan van Oort, Anneke
Poppenk, and Ruud Janssen

On September 21, 2024, as part of Operation Market Garden, the Airborne Landings were commemorated on the Ginkelse Heide in Ede. This year it was 80 years ago and therefore very special. In addition to the commemoration with many invited guests and also veterans from that time, the public gathered en masse to this event. About 30-35,000 people attend the annual commemoration, but on September 21 of this year there were expected more than 80,000 visitors. A great moment to promote the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 005, liberation of the Netherlands, because there are always many stalls on the field next to the Ginkelse Heide and there are (military) demonstrations. The airborne landings of the paratroopers are of course always a spectacle to see and also the various military aircrafts.



Normally, RCL005 has its own promotional tent on the field, but this year that was not allowed due to the many requests for stalls. That was why we provided the assigned stall with Canadian flags at 07:30AM and displayed our products and information.

Next to our stall were our colleagues from the Dutch Polar Bears. They told us in detail about what had happened in the Second World War and how they were involved.

The promotional 'tent' of RCL005 was a busy spot on the field. From 08:30AM it was already busy and the crew, consisting of Reinier and Suzanne Groeneveld, Connie Lempke, Elly van Wakeren, myself and as extra help Anneke and Wim Poppenk had their hands full with the sale of our remembrance items and the conversations that took place with the public.



Many children, whether or not dressed up or made up, came along the stall with their parents. They often had nice questions about “our Canadians” such as: Why did they come to the Netherlands? How old were the soldiers? and similar questions. Of course also for our pins, flags and other items. It was a nice opportunity for Reinier and Suzanne to have a conversation about the RCL005 Youth Auxiliary and the Carry Their Torch project, which is a nice start for children to learn more about our deceased liberators. The elderly were also very interested in our work as a Legion, the existence of which they often did not know. So a good opportunity to explain that.

The British and Canadians were often surprised that there was a Legion Branch in the Netherlands. Information was therefore also exchanged about the way in which the branches operate in Canada. The objectives there are usually different than in the Netherlands. We focus mainly on commemorating and remembering the liberators, who found their final resting place in the cemeteries in the Netherlands. In Canada, it is more focused on the togetherness of the soldiers and relatives.



The promotion team has been very busy at the Ginkelse Heide, but has done it with great pleasure and hopefully contributed to further promotion of our branch and the maintenance of the fact that we should never forget what our liberators have done for us.



We are the guardians of Remembrance

Battle of the Scheldt

Contributed by Comrade Hank Bahlman

‘The Battle of the Scheldt, from September to November 1944, was hell for the Canadian and Allied soldiers.’

Canada’s bloodiest battle in World War II was fought on our doorstep. Following D-Day, the Allies successfully drove the Germans out of occupied territory, but at a pace that outstripped their supply capabilities. To open a supply route, they gained control of the critical port of Antwerp, but the port was separated from the open sea by eighty kilometers of the Scheldt Estuary waterways. Led by Canadian forces, the battles lasted from mid-September to early November. They were fought on ground that was so waterlogged and muddy that tanks couldn’t manoeuvre. It was also so flat and open that only aerial reconnaissance was possible.

To defeat the Germans, the Allies got permission from the Dutch government to bomb the dikes and flood the surrounding lands with sea water. In the end, this victory cost the Allies almost 13,000 casualties, over half of whom were Canadians.

One Canadian soldier remarked, *“For days on end we lived as strange animals in the mud, in the mist, and in the penetrating cold. I hate this land that consisted only of mud and water.”*

Another Canadian soldier said, *“We had to put empty ammunition boxes in our foxholes because there was six inches of water in them; it rained for days on end.”*



For days the soldiers’ boots, socks, and uniforms were soaked from the rain and mud they were standing in. One Allied officer called the Canadian soldiers the ‘Water-Rats.’ In the provinces of Zeeland and our part of West Brabant, most of the land was flooded by the Germans beforehand and the Allies had bombed the dikes.

The Battle of the Scheldt is a chapter of the Second World War that has been largely forgotten, except by the people of the Netherlands and the Canadian soldiers who liberated them.

The victory marked a turning point in the Allies’ final push into Germany, but for weeks that push was in jeopardy, because clearing the 80-kilometre Scheldt was not a priority for Allied Command. When it finally became a priority, the ‘Battle of the Scheldt’ became the most important campaign Canadian soldiers ever waged.

Facing fierce German resistance and trudging through the flooded low-lying Dutch terrain, they pressed on after devastating setbacks.

The battle lasted more than two months. In the end, 6,367 Canadian soldiers and more than 6,000 other Allied soldiers lost their lives in The Battle of the Scheldt.

After D-Day, opening the port of Antwerp for the Allies was crucial; however, Field Marshal Montgomery did not think so and instead pushed for 'Operation Market Garden,' which was a fiasco. 7,000 soldiers died or were missing in that action.

Most harbours in France and Belgium were heavily damaged, but Antwerp remained intact. The Belgian underground had sabotaged everything at the harbour, so the Germans could not blow it up.

Throughout the war years, the Germans built many bunkers and fortifications in the western part of the province of Noord-Brabant; at the airbase in Woensdrecht, the harbour town of Willemstad, Steenberg, along the waters-edge by Het Volkerak, and Hollands-Diep en the Maas. In the province of Zeeland by the North-Sea, everything was also heavily fortified.

When the German troops left, and the mean fighting soldiers of the German Kurt Chill group took their place, the Canadians had a formidable enemy. As it turned out, a German General knew what was important to the Allies, so after General Gustav-Adolf von Zangen, with his 15th Army in a siege of the allied troops at Calais, had managed to escape, the majority of his troops (about 90,000 men) crossed the Westerschelde, thus providing a strong defense with his powerful occupation troops across the Scheldt estuary. Part of Zeeland was flooded, and the Germans waited for what was to come.



The "Battle of the Scheldt" aimed to open the sea access to the Port of Antwerp and make it accessible to allied ships. The plan for this was an attack north from Antwerp to Bergen op Zoom (Operation Aintree), en route to Woensdrecht, deviating to South Beveland (operations Vitality I and II), and then the attack on Walcheren (Operation Infatuate I and II).

The battles at Woensdrecht were fierce, with high losses on both sides. An assault on Hoogerheide on October 13, 1944, resulted in the deaths of all four company commanders, with one company of 90 men reduced to just 4 survivors. [LINK](#)

Comrade Hank Bahlman was just 11 years old during the liberation. He recalls that *“there was no gas, electricity or running water. We had started out with the six of us in the cellar but ended up with 16. We were lucky that we had a 20-foot-long arched stone cellar with another foot of sand on top, beneath our living room floorboards. Our house was built in the early eighteen hundreds or even earlier. Into our only window well, we threw in cut up tree trunks and also piled them on top outside. We had to burn candles night and day. Since French francs had a hole in the middle, we would put one of these coins over the wick to make the candle last longer. That was a trick we learned in the wartime.”*

“The kids slept five in a single bed, lying sideways with their legs dangling over the edge. (That’s a little different than the song “Sleeping Single in a Double Bed”.) The adults would take turns resting in the reclining chair (Rookstoel) or on the other single bed. None of us really slept, though. We were being shelled night and day. There were three direct hits on our house. Two-thirds of all the houses in town were damaged or completely demolished during this time.”

“I played on a local farm every afternoon (because we had school only in the morning; the Germans had confiscated our schools for their soldiers in the wartime). The farmer was ordered to take a wagonload of German soldiers with his horse and wagon to Willemstadt in order for them to escape across the big river by boat. He was gone for over two days and his wife feared, “he is not going to come back”. The farmer returned on Monday at 5 am. In the meantime, the Germans had their canons set-up in the meadow beside the farm and were shooting at the Canadians a kilometre away. The farm was next to the main highway.”

The next day there was a lull in the fighting, so the farmer and his family left their air-raid shelter and fled on foot, covered with white bedsheets so as not to be mistaken for soldiers. The farmer, his wife, and nine children, as well as his 80-year-old mother-in-law (in a wheelbarrow), fled from the frontline.

Upon their return after the liberation, they found the barns in ruins, the cattle dead and over 400 craters around the house and in the meadow.

Comrade Bahlman continued: “On October 30, 1944, at 4:15 p.m. the Germans attempted to blow up our 263-foot-high church tower with dynamite. Their first try was unsuccessful because the Dutch resistance had sabotaged the wires. Then they began shooting at the dynamite from across the Market. While they were still shooting, they sent two of their own soldiers to blow up the church and themselves. Although maybe they did not blow themselves up after all; maybe they were the two soldiers found half a year later hiding in the heating culverts and under the altar in the furnace room.”

“By the time Welberg was liberated on November 4, all the houses lay in ruins, and 30 civilians had lost their lives. As a result, there wasn't much to celebrate that day. Alongside the civilian casualties, 57 Canadian soldiers and 20 German soldiers also died.”

“On November 4, 1944, the 4th Canadian Division, British and Polish soldiers liberated Steenberg. That day we got white bread that a baker had made to celebrate our liberation. The soldiers gave us corned beef and chocolate. What a feast. Thank you, soldiers. You looked so old to me when I was twelve, but now, I realize most of them were just young boys. But, what boys they were!”

Thank you for your contribution, Hans!

Keira (16) from Canada visits great-uncle's grave in Holten: 'Proud and sad at the same time.'

Contributed by Comrade Mark Veldhuis and Sander Jongsma



Dozens of young people from different countries are currently on exchange in the Netherlands. Keira Fraser (16) from Canada is also participating in the YouCee 2024 conference. Because a family member of hers is buried in the Canadian cemetery in Holten, she was allowed to travel to Holten to visit his grave. Keira said the sight of his grave made her *'proud, grateful and sad at the same time'*.

Earlier this week, we spoke with Keira during a visit to the Canadian cemetery in Groesbeek, where the sight of so many tombstones left her breathless. In Holten, however, Keira feels much more at ease. Alongside a fellow student, she searches for the grave of her great-uncle, James Fraser, and they quickly locate his final resting place. She places a wooden cross before the stone and whispers: "He's a long way from home now." She recalls the photographs she had seen back home. *"I can still picture him smiling in all those photos..."* she says, wiping away a tear.

James was killed shortly after the liberation

Just like in Groesbeek, Keira is impressed by the cemetery in Holten. *"It's so well maintained. I am very grateful that you take such good care of the graves in the Netherlands."*

James Fraser was an electrical engineer in the Canadian Army. In 1943, he served in Italy and later made his way to the Netherlands through France. Though he survived the war and witnessed the liberation, tragedy struck afterward. He fell into a canal near Groningen, hitting his head so severely that he couldn't swim. Although bystanders pulled him from the water, he later succumbed to his injuries in hospital.

Did they have a choice?

These are stories shared by Keira and her fellow students from the Netherlands, Poland, and Germany. *"The main goal is that we, as young people of all nationalities, get to know each other. Eighty years ago, we were still at war with each other. We are learning from the past and want to avoid making the same mistakes in the future,"* Keira explains.

Keira comes from a small town in Canada and is proud of her great-uncle. *"All these men who are lying here have had to make such a great sacrifice, for which I am extremely grateful. I don't know if I would have done the same. But did they, often very young men, have a choice?"*, the 16-year-old student wonders.

'Fraser' pride

In the place where she is now, a serene silence reigns. The evening sun is low and casts a golden glow over the cemetery. It visibly moves her. *"I can imagine him sitting at the table with my father, grandfather, and his other brothers in our small village in Canada. As I stand here, I am incredibly proud to bear the name 'Fraser'."*

Keira mentions that she hopes to return to the Netherlands someday. But first, she's going to call her dad to share what she's just experienced.

RCAF Halifax JB966 LQ-D



Contributed by Comrade Wim Poppenk

A few weeks ago, a request came in via the Branch general email for information about the crash site and monument in memory of the crew of the crashed bomber, RCAF Halifax JB966 LQ-D, which crashed on May 14, 1943 in Den Kaat, a hamlet just north of the village of Balkbrug, in northern Overijssel.

I have driven past this location almost every week without knowing about this monument.

RCAF Halifax JB966-LQ-D took off from Gransen Lodge Air Base, Huntingdonshire, in eastern England, at around midnight for a mission to Bochum in Germany. On her way back to England, the Halifax was shot at by Hauptmann Herbert Lutje, in a Messerschmidt ME 11 OG-2. The Halifax caught fire and a hopeless situation ensued. There was nothing left for the captain to do but to order the crew to abandon the aircraft. Unfortunately, only four of the seven crew members succeeded.



The plane crashed at 2:30 am, just behind a farm.

The crew consisted of:

1. RCAF Lieutenant Donald Beattie, officer pilot, killed in action
2. RCAF Lieutenant Ralph Eric Hart, pilot, killed in action
3. RCAF Lieutenant J.S. Hawtin, navigator, survivor, prisoner of war
4. RCAF Sergeant J.D. Gibson, flight engineer, survived, prisoner of war
5. RCAF Sergeant Sydney Buchanan Hawley, radio operator, killed in action
6. RAF Sergeant K.W. Clarke, bomb aimer, survived, prisoner of war
7. RAF Sergeant R. Ferguson, air gunner, survived, prisoner of war

The three fallen crew members are buried at the municipal (CWGC) cemetery in Oud-Avereest. The survivors were taken prisoner by the Germans and survived the war.

On May 14, 2023, just a year and a half ago, a monument was unveiled on the grounds of the farm in memory of the crew. This revelation occurred within a 'small circle'. To the left of the monument, a small crater from the crash still remains, preserved by the farm owner ever since.

The current residents of the farm are direct descendants of the original occupants. They, along with the hamlet, wholeheartedly supported the initiative for a monument and provided the land for its placement. Contact has been established with the author of the email, whose father managed to escape the plane and survive the war. Their family plans to visit the Netherlands in 2025 and make a trip to Den Kaat.



RCL 005 Youth Auxiliary



The Branch 005 Youth Auxiliary was established in July 2023 with the goal of encouraging youth to play their own role in honouring our Canadian liberators and to help share their stories with future generations.

We do this in various ways, illustrated by our activities over the past few weeks.

In the last weekend of October, we took part in several commemorations of the Battle of the Scheldt, including unveiling of a new monument in Woensdrecht honouring the Black Watch regiment on Black Friday, the commemoration at Sloedam, and of course, the commemoration at Bergen-op-Zoom Canadian War Cemetery.

At all of these events, we proudly carried the new Canadian Remembrance Torch. This Torch came to the Netherlands from Canada, via Normandy. The Torch is made even more special by a design that creates a flame in the shape of a whirlpool. We are very pleased to see the reactions from the public seeing the participation of youth in these commemorations are regarded as a beautiful and meaningful addition.

The Youth Auxiliary has also been actively involved with the promotion tent. In the past few months, we have often been part of the promo team. During several recent events, we spoke to a lot of people and that yielded a lot of interest. It was not only very useful but also very enjoyable!

Finally, we would like to highlight Project Carry Their Torch. Since September, we have regularly published videos showcasing various locations in the Netherlands that honour our Canadian liberators. Recently, we sent an invitation to all secondary schools in the Netherlands with the invitation to use this Project to involve the students in the commemoration of 80 years of liberation. In the Christmas issue of the a magazine for history teachers (from VGN Kleio) an article will be published about Project Carry their Torch.



Our activities are not only a lot of fun, but they are also often very educational. Addressing people with an important message to share and "networking" during events is instructive; however, also working with and learning from different people is a special addition to the experiences of the Youth Auxiliary.

For more information, please visit:

www.youth-auxiliary-rcl005.nl

and

www.project-carry-their-torch.nl



Coming Up

We have reached the end of our busy commemoration season and the Christmas season is fast approaching.

The Board would like to thank all of our members for their support and participation in the various events, celebrations, social gatherings, and commemorations over this past year.

This fall the first of the 80th liberation commemorations around the Netherlands began. We are now looking forward to the new year with many more of these events coming up, culminating in the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the entire country from occupation and tyranny.

We can't do any of this without your help and participation.

You have seen many (MANY) invitations in your email inboxes in the past three months. Expect more of the same in early 2025! You are always welcome to attend these events.

In other news, we are working hard on our website in the coming months. While you may not see many changes immediately, know that we have a team working hard to revamp the website in both Dutch and English to make it easier to find the information you are looking for and to register for events! Photos will primarily be kept via our social media, but we will, of course, maintain the archive of our past photos as we migrate to the new site.

If you are interested or able, we would appreciate your help in this endeavour! You do not need programming or professional ICT experience, but your input to various pages/sections of the new website would be greatly appreciated.

Please reach out to webmaster@rci005.org to let us know.

We wish you and your family a very happy holiday season and we hope to see you at the New Year's Reception at Mondani on January 19th. Details will soon follow.

With respect and gratitude,
Your editors,

Amanda Slotboom
Berry Swarthoff

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