From the President Alice van Bekkum

It took me a while to start writing the newsletter this time. So many things have happened since you received the last edition in 2016.

First of all we would like to thank the people who supported us through the donate button on our website, or through our bank account that is to be found on the website as well. Especially we thank Paul Bickerton for his encouraging words and generous donation. He is the uncle of Private Walter M. Kasurak of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada (Princess Louise’s).

Unfortunately we cannot thank you all in person since we have no contact information. Anyway we want to express our gratitude to all of you!

Before I continue I will go back to July 2016: Nijmegen Marches. After the ceremony at the cemetery I met with Charles Whenes and his grandson Gustaaf, both participating in the Marches. They visited the grave of W. D. Armstrong of Shaunavon, Saskatchewan, who was a Warrant Officer Class II at the Regina Riffle Regiment. Walter Douglas Armstrong was the oldest in a family of 11 siblings. The mother of Charles’ daughter-in-law was his youngest sister. Charles told me that when he visits the grave he finds fresh flowers every year.

The relatives would love to know who laid them there?

On October 14th, together with the committee of Holten and the Foundation United Adopters American War Graves we were invited by the Association for the Russian War Cemetery in Amersfoort. We got an impressive guided tour over the cemetery and in the concentration camp Amersfoort.
On Sunday 9 April 2017 it was exactly 75 years ago that seventy seven Russian POW were executed by the Germans and buried in a mass grave. Until today no information has been found about who they were. The Association has heard that they possibly were very young soldiers from Uzbekistan. The commemoration was held early Sunday morning, at the place and at the time they were executed. A candle was lit for every single soldier.

Just like we do for our project Faces To Graves, the committee of the Russian cemetery wants to remember these forgotten soldiers.

Remco Reiding, Soviet War Cemetery Foundation

This makes me feel so privileged to live in freedom which we also owe your Canadian military men!

October 30th we joined the commemoration at the Canadian cemetery for Canada Memorial Day in Bergen op Zoom. Adriaan van der Pol our treasurer and I laid a wreath on behalf of the Faces To Graves Foundation. The evening before that we spent an interesting evening at the ‘Canadays Lecture’; the theme was: “Freedom is a verb”.

Alice van Bekkum and Adrian van der Pol

Remembrance Day
November 11th, we gathered for the ceremony at a very cold and windy cemetery in Groesbeek. Marko Kuipers, a volunteer for our Research Team and I laid a wreath. Canadian military staff stationed in Germany and their families joined the commemoration.

Alice van Bekkum and Marko Kuipers
In the picture you’ll see the Canadian Ambassador Mrs. Sabine Nölke and her husband seated at the first row on the left.

Color party

November 13th we also joined the commemoration for Remembrance Day at the National Canadian Liberation Monument in Apeldoorn which is called ‘the man with two hats’. A similar monument is situated in Ottawa.

On behalf of the Foundation Liberation ’45, our counsellor Jelle Reitsma remembered two military men buried in Groesbeek in his speech: William Andrew Cross, who was a Flight Sergeant at the Royal Canadian Air Force and Trooper Hadley Bannan of the 8th Princess Louise’s (New Brunswick) Hussars.

Jelle Reitsma
Also in November I met Wim Felix, he is one of the founders of the monument in Rha in Gelderland. In the battle of Rha seven men of the Queen’s Own Rifles were killed; they are remembered on the monument.

Wim Felix not only donated his ‘archive’ about these men, but also gave a generous donation to Faces To Graves.

One of the soldiers called Donald Patience was badly wounded in that fight and died in a field hospital. He had a girlfriend while his regiment stayed in Nijmegen; she was called Joyce. After he died his family received his belongings with a photo of this beautiful young woman. In wartime the soldiers had to be careful and should not mention names or places in the letters they sent to their family. The family has always wondered who this ‘Joyce’ would be…

As a last attempt to find her I asked the local newspaper De Gelderlander to write an article about her. Maybe someone would recognize her in that photo. You can find this article on our website, going to ‘Media’. Some people told me she could have been the daughter of Mary and William Eyre, who were British. Her Dad worked for Unilever in Nijmegen and her Mum was a soprano singer; their daughter Joyce Marion was born here.

So far we have no confirmation that this is the right Joyce, we even interviewed a lady who was at the same school as Joyce but she did not recognize the photo. But you never know what will come up?

**DEVELOPMENTS**

Because of this newspaper article some people contacted us; some of them even offered to be a volunteer for our Research Team! Others phoned and told me they had adopted a grave just after war. I visited them and got permission to copy the photos and correspondence they have had with relatives.
Donna Maxwell, our appreciated contact in Calgary sent us at the end of the year around ninety photos, mostly Airmen. A great result from her active research! Donna thank you for sharing them with us!

We also received a message of Gary Silliker through a relative of one of the men buried in Groesbeek. He shared a lot of short stories with us about the men from Miramichi, New Brunswick, some of whom are buried in Holten and Bergen op Zoom. As a Royal Canadian Engineer he also send us biographies of lots of Engineers. Gary because of you we have less work to do for this time-consuming project!

Christmas eve was very special, a few inhabitants of Groesbeek initiated a candle event as has happened in Holten already for many years. This organisation was pleased to find enough volunteers and I was one of them. Only the weather was not very helpful; heavy wind blew out the candles again and again. The volunteers had a hard job to relight the candles. It was a wonderful sight at the end; many visitors joined this very special event. For Groesbeek a new tradition was born!

After we found some volunteers prepared to help us in research, we organized a meeting on 27 January to give them information what we do and we explained our terms and conditions.

Together with some members of the Holten committee we have tried to catch the interest of the volunteers and it has worked out well: many of them signed up which
made me very happy. We cannot accomplish this project without the help of volunteers! We have eight volunteers now who are active in the Research Team.

We were hosted by the municipality of Berg en Dal in the impressive council chamber.

We received an email of Antoon Verbakel, a member of the Documentation Group Volkel. He found our brochure in the Liberation Museum and he offered to share all the information this organization has gathered about WWII crashes and the casualties. Again we are spoiled with all this information for our database, and it is very much appreciated!

Sunday 12 March students of the Kingsway College School of Etobicoke, Ontario, visited the cemetery.

We handed out poppies to the students.

Jennifer MacDonald, one of the teachers at this school approached me before they came. She is a
relative of Sapper Leslie Roherty of the Royal Canadian Engineers. His name is written on the Wall of Remembrance of the Memorial, which means he has no known grave. For relatives it is difficult not to know what happened to their loved ones. Jenn MacDonald brought photos and a life story his cousins Jean Kealty and Joyce MacArthur.

We laid a wreath near Leslie Roherty’s name on the wall, to remember him.

I have to admit the RCE has a special place in my heart, since my very first search for information about the soldier in that lonely war grave at a general cemetery in Gorinchem. That soldier was Harold Magnusson of the 23rd Field Company RCE, killed in a very difficult operation called Berlin. Here the Engineers showed their courage and strength; they evacuated 2,400 exhausted allied soldiers who were trapped in a corridor near Arnhem after operation Market Garden failed. Harold and Leslie were in the same boat when it got a direct hit in the middle of the river...

April 12th I met Laurie Doxsee; earlier she sent me a message that she would come to Europe together with her granddaughter Madeline. This tour was organized by the Centennial High School of Belleville, Ontario. After their visit to Vimy Ridge the students visited Camp Vught National Memorial. This was a good possibility for me to meet Laurie, so we did.

Read more about Allen Weese and his wife Marjorie in the Newsletter 2016-No. 2.

Just before finishing this newsletter something special happened. At the cemetery I met relatives of Sergeant Aubrey Cosens of the Queen’s Own Rifles of Canada. During the Rhineland Offensive he was awarded with the Victoria Cross for his brave action. Unfortunately he was killed by a sniper before he got the chance to know about that.

And now I met his namesake Aubrey Cosens, who is the youngest in the family of Mark Cosens from St. Thomas, Ontario.
Here you see the men of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission who maintain the cemetery so beautifully, together with Aubrey. They often guide people to this grave, but this time they were asked by relatives!

PLATFORM

Now I will tell you about the platform called ‘Canadian War Graves.NL’. This platform is formed by delegates from the three committees for the three Canadian War Cemeteries in The Netherlands. The delegates are working on the development of a professional database of with information of all Canadian soldiers buried in our country. All together this gives us more opportunities and chance of success. Each foundation will keep its own responsibilities and identity of course. The platform holds monthly meetings and fundraising has started now, so the platform can work with an IT company in order to design the virtual monument.

FACES TO GRAVES

Lately Jelle Reitsma and I had a meeting with Director External Relations, Liz Sweet and Christine Connerty, Commemorations and PR Supervisor of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. They were impressed by our initiative and consider it a challenge. We got permission to use their records for our database from the very beginning of our project. We discussed new media possibilities in order to get in touch with relatives of the soldiers. Liz proposed to ask for permission from the responsible authorities to place an information column outside the entrance of the cemetery.

On the Faces To Graves meeting 9 March we said farewell to our Vice-President/Secretary Jan van Loo. Without the efforts of Jan, the foundation would not have been established. Of course we owe him much more than that! We are aware of the fact that he has told us from the beginning that he would not stay for
an unlimited period of time. We are very happy that Jan remains available as Counsellor and as such remains involved with us.

On behalf of the committee Alice expresses her gratitude to Jan and hands some bottles of wine, produced in Groesbeek.

March 23rd the committees of Holten and Groesbeek were invited by the committee of Bergen op Zoom. We enjoyed a guided tour by Stef Traas, managing director, through the Liberation Museum Zeeland at Nieuwdorp in Walcheren. In the afternoon the platform had a meeting, while the other committee members visited the cemetery in Bergen op Zoom. We finished a very nice day with a hot meal before driving home.

On our Faces To Graves website we added a number of website links (scroll down to the bottom of the page); these are from the organizations who share their information with us. And now we are friends with the Groesbeek Airborne Friends, an active committee who support us with information and advice.

The Groesbeek committee has now started to approach local companies to ask for a donation. As you can understand we cannot work without financial support.

At the end of this letter we want to ask you to visit our Facebook page and like and share the page with your contacts? https://www.facebook.com/FacesToGraves