From the President Alice van Bekkum

And then suddenly everything happens and I almost don't find a free moment to write the newsletter. That is fortunate because there is at last good news in sight. All the years of preparation are beginning to bear fruit. I will tell you about the highlights of the last six months.

First of all, on 23 May, the association Canadian War Graves Nederland (CWG.NL) was set up, a milestone in national cooperation between the organisations for the three Canadian war cemeteries in our land.
In Bergen op Zoom, the notary, Caroline de Maat prepared the document for us pro dedo for which we are very grateful. Witnesses of this official moment were Christa and Peer Oppers, both retired Air Force officers. Christa was until recently the Dutch Defense Attache in Canada. Each association has two representatives on the current board; for Faces to Graves is that Jelle Reitsma as chairman and myself as board member. The project plan is ready and the necessary fundraising for developing the Digital Monument can begin. The fundraising is done by Drs. Marieke Dumont from Dumont Advies.

Earlier this year the board met the Canadian ambassador, Sabine Nölke in The Hague. Speaking about the possibility of making our project better known in Canada, the ambassador suggested among other things, to approach family members through the Royal Canadian Legion Magazine. This happened in the November issue and we have some first reactions already.

In June we were pleasantly surprised by Gerrie Driessen, member of the local history society in Groesbeek. He is the author of book ‘De historie van de Canadese begraafplaats en de Zevenheuvelenweg in Groesbeek’ (The History of the Canadian Cemetery and the Zevenheuvelenweg in Groesbeek) and has donated 140 copies of his book to us.

We are also allowed, with source acknowledgement, to use information and photos from the book for our data base. The revenue from this book will be given to our association for which we are very thankful. If you are interested, contact us; unfortunately it is only available in Dutch.
Than the Nijmegen Marches. This year, for the first time, the remembrance ceremony of the Canadian detachment was not on the Thursday when the route passes the cemetery. It was for years a tradition that the various participants in the Canadian regiments gathered together at midday to hold a commemoration. That was very hard for the walkers; they had to stand still for a long time and then had to walk another ten kilometers, and that sometimes in burning heat. For this reason it was decided that this time it would take place on Monday morning, before the beginning of the marches. It did not go completely smoothly because it was new for everybody. But it was a nice service and much less taxing for the soldiers.

On the Thursday there was a short ceremony with different nationalities, including a Swiss regiment. At the end of the ceremony, every soldier was given a rose to lay on a grave of his choice and that was very moving.
That day I was at the cemetery with some members of our research team as ambassadors for Faces to Graves. We had some interesting meetings and talks, one with Brad Biggar from Support Staff and another with the ‘Glens’, the soldiers from the Glengarry, Stormont and Dundas regiment; 38 soldiers from this regiment lie in Groesbeek, with the names of two missing soldiers on the Memorial.

Brad Biggar and Alice.

We found by the grave of Lance Corporal Ken Fitzpatrick from the Black Watch of Canada a letter, carefully wrapped in plastic, which we hesitantly opened. We were touched by the loving words directed to Ken and again we were reminded how much these soldiers are missed by the family. Alas, there was no address; we would very much like to have contact with Ken’s family. Who can help us?
A week before the Nijmegen Marches I was surprised by a call from Fons de Poel, the TV journalist and presenter who reports this event every year. He wanted to give special attention to our project with an interview at the cemetery. He suggested we focus on one of the soldiers buried there who had a special story. We decided on Pilot Officer Robert Allan Weese, who died two months before his 21st birthday in a crash in Bochum, Germany. Just before he left for Europe, he married his childhood love, Marjorie. His widow never had the chance to visit his grave. When she was finally able to travel to the Netherlands, after the death of her second husband, together with the sister of Bob as she called him, something terrible happened. Marjorie fell from the stairs in the house where she was staying. On arrival in the hospital she was found to have died, as a result of which her visit to his grave never took place...

*Fons de Poel takes us to ‘The True Heroes of Groesbeek’.*
Do you want to know more, look at our website. Thanks to Fons and the NCRV, who have put a part of this broadcast at our disposal. Thank you for the lovely tribute.

Jelle and I had an appointment at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) in Ypres, Belgium on 2 August. We discussed, among other things, the possibility of realising an event called: 'The Faces of Groesbeek' during the 75th commemoration in May 2020, as happens at the American cemetery in Margraten. That is the placing of a metal standard with a picture, placed next to the graves. Unfortunately, we did not get permission for this. Two other subjects were discussed: an information center at the cemetery, as is already a beautiful building in Holten and is being built in Bergen op Zoom. And adoptions of graves, Faces To Graves regularly receives the question whether a grave can be adopted and we shall look further into the possibilities.

After an earlier whispered call for help in the ears of Christa and Peers Oppers, we met to discuss how they, living far away, could best do something for us. As old soldiers, they are fully supportive of our initiative to honor our Canadian liberators with a digital monument. We came to the conclusion that the editing of the life stories would fit best in the time they had available. Christa and Peers, thank you for your support!

An email came from Elaine Woods in Watford, Ontario, the daughter of Lt. Col. Lloyd C. Winhold of the North Nova Scotia Highlanders. Her father survived the war but died in 1977. She is coming to Europe and wants to walk in her father’s footsteps, together with her children and grandchildren who live in Paris. She asked if we could help with part of the route: the Rhineland offensive. Her father had taken part in the fighting in Bienen, near Rees in Germany, the place where Harriet Jeneraux’s father, Sergeant Edison Smith lost his life (see newsletter 2017 No.4). The historian Josef Becker from Bienen wanted to help and we were warmly welcomed in the ‘Bürgerhaus’. Josef and his son Güssi took us for a guided tour with help of the local history association.
On 12 September all the members of the Board were introduced to two members of the Recommendation committee in Mayor Mark Slinkman’s office. Given the fact that they are the present and previous mayors of this township, an anchor has now been set up within Groesbeek (Berg and Dal)

*From left to right: Adriaan van der Pol, Jelle Reitsma, Paul Wilbers, Jan van Loo, Mark Slinkman, Alice van Bekkum, Dick Akerboom and Wim Poppenk.*

At the end of September, members of the Glen’s association toured along the route that the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders (Glen ‘s) took in Europe. ‘The Glen’s 150th anniversary tour’ also came to Groesbeek. Wigger and Lenie van der Horst put ‘Glen Memorials’ on all the graves connected with this regiment. Read an extended contribution from Wigger on: http://www.noviomagus.nl.html>oorlog>Highlanders

From 15 October we have a new Webmaster, Terry Verduijn; he is the partner of the daughter of two Research Team members. Terry, we are very pleased with your efforts!

At the same time we say goodbye to Frank van Duin, who set up this website in 2015. He is busy with his company, restoring his Willy ’s jeep and last but not least, the baby that is coming! Thank you Frank, for the pleasant cooperation and all your efforts. We wish you and Lidy a very happy parenthood.

*Frank and his Willy’s jeep.*
International attention for Faces to Graves: Marko Kuiper, member of our research team, works as a lawyer for the American company Oshkosh corporation with worldwide branches. This company chose our project as one of their activities during their charity event called 'Good to Give Back Week'.

Marko Kuipers

On 22 October, a number of locations in the United States, the United Kingdom, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands investigated twenty soldiers with an American background during a part of the day, while they were in contact with each other through videoconferencing. They did research on twenty soldiers buried in Groesbeek with a background in the United States, where there was also the greatest chance of finding their relatives. At the end of the afternoon, each team reported their findings to Alice by videoconference, and she thanked the participants on behalf of Faces to Graves.

These are impressive results that we received; in addition to photographs, documents, information and contacts with relatives, even a passage in a free E-book was found in which was described how one of the soldiers got killed!

Several participants have thanked Faces to Graves for their valuable experience, which meant participating in this event for them and especially for the 'close up' perspective on the tragedy behind each war grave, which changed their view of war history for good.

Through advertisements in local newspapers, we have two new volunteers. Hans and Patrick. Welcome to our research team! And a teacher from Canisius College took up contact with us. The research and writing of life stories by the students would fit well with their project 'Remember and Commemorate' that will start in the spring. We are allowed to use the existing school project in Holten for it, thanks to Mark Veldhuis. Our vice-president Dick Akerboom will watch over this and who knows, maybe more schools will join in the future.

Just before finishing this newsletter there was gratifying news from CWG.NL: the collaboration with the Dutch War Graves foundation gives us the possibility for the free use of their database. This will lower the costs for the development of the Digital Monument which includes the names of all the Canadian soldiers
buried or remembered in the Netherlands, including those in the smaller cemeteries. www.canadianwargraves.nl will appear shortly with links to the websites of the three participating organizations. We will do our very best to make the life stories available as soon as possible.

The yearly commemoration on Remembrance Day for the fallen of the Commonwealth of Nations took place on Sunday, 11 November. Canadian military stationed in Geilenkirchen, Germany organised it. Warm words from the Padre and the presence of the crew of the Canadian navy ship HMCS Ville de Quebec moored in the harbour of Amsterdam, made for a fine remembrance day.

On Thursday evening, 15 November we were the guests of Ambassador Sabine Nölke at the Red Maple Soirée. During the evening our foundation was pleased to receive a donation of 1000 euros, half of which was a personal gift from Ms. Sabine Nölke and her husband Christopher Ram.

We are completely dependent on donations and greatly appreciate this handsome gesture. At the end of the evening, a surprise awaited me when I was asked to come forward. There Col. Tim Young presented me with a nice certificate as a token of appreciation for my work for Faces to Graves. But without the efforts of our volunteers I could not do it, so part of this honour is due to them.
Here I would like to express my thanks for the work of the members of the Board; I think also of the many kilometers they have to travel for meetings and other obligations.

As you understand we can only work on this project with the help of your gifts; we would like to thank everyone who helps!

The board of Faces To Graves is very grateful to Richard Meeussen, owner of hotel restaurant 't Zwaantje in Mook. He offered free accommodation for the monthly meetings of the Research Team. In the meantime, we really feel at home in this hospitable place.

On our website you can find different life stories that will give you an idea about the work our researchers and others are doing.

Finally, I wish you all a beautiful Christmas and a New Year in peace!

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