

# Newsletter

No 19 – spring 2025



We are pleased to report on the activities of Faces to Graves since autumn 2024.

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## New Year's concert "We will remember them"



On Saturday, January 11, and Sunday, January 12, 2025, Fanfare Jubilate Deo performed its New Year's concerts in collaboration with the Faces to Graves Foundation. The year 2025 represents a significant milestone in Dutch history: 80 years of Freedom.

The concert was not just about the music; it was truly an emotional journey through time. The musical program of Jubilate Deo combined the emotions of war with the joy of liberation. Many classics were reviewed: "The Story of Anne Frank," "Schindler's List," and cheerful music by The Andrews Sisters.

Fred Hulsman, a researcher at the Faces to Graves foundation, shared with the audience the life stories of some of the first Canadian soldiers who died in Groesbeek, specifically soldier George Joseph Lightfoot and soldier Charles Melvin Crellin. Below are their complete biographies, which are well worth reading.

[LIGHTFOOT George Joseph](#)

[CRELLIN Charles Melvin](#)

During these two days, all seats in the concert hall De Sleutel, Breedeweg, Groesbeek were filled. This concert served as not only a poignant reminder to honor the fallen but also a powerful way to convey the value of peace and freedom to the people. During the concerts, the audience was invited to reflect on the past and express gratitude for the future.

After both concerts, it was clear that people were impressed by what they had experienced.

[Video 2025 Jubilate Deo](#)

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### **Meeting Veteran Affairs Canada**

After Fred Hulsman and Alice van Bekkum attended an initial exploratory meeting with a delegation from Veteran Affairs Canada at the Freedom Museum on 12 December, we remained uncertain for a long time whether they would join our opening ceremony on 2 May.

That changed on 22 January, when we heard during the meeting in a room of the town hall in Groesbeek, that they wanted to collaborate with us for the ceremony on 2 May. For Faces to Graves, this meant that we immediately had to apply for various permits from the municipality and the province. A time-consuming task, Marek Sengers from the municipality and Saskia Peters worked together extensively for this, with a positive result only shortly beforehand. They did an excellent job!

Veteran Affairs will cover part of the costs and the agreements that Faces to Graves had already made will be taken into account. Later, an intensive collaboration started in the preparation for 2 May under the leadership of Jennifer MacLeod, National Manager, International Commemorative Events of Veteran Affairs Canada. We would like to thank everyone who contributed for the pleasant cooperation!



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### **RT-meeting: Gijs 100 bios**

During the Faces to Graves Research Team meeting on Saturday morning, January 25, Gijs Krist was highlighted. This volunteer contacted Faces to Graves

at the end of 2018 because he wanted to write the life story of Sergeant Clarence Elgy Scott of the Royal Canadian Air Force.

He was killed on June 22, 1944, when the Lancaster bomber LN 570 was struck by enemy fire at 1:15 AM and crashed on the road from Rossum to Heerewaarden. Seven crew members lost their lives: four British, two Australian men, and the Canadian Clarence Scott.

Gijs, along with three other residents of Heerewaarden, ensured that a monument was erected on Hoogestraat. You can find Clarence Elgy Scott's life story on the Faces to Graves website in the digital monument under 'Graves'. Gijs developed an interest and joined the Research Team, where he is a valued writer. In March 2022, he received the Faces to Graves coin for writing 50 life stories.

At the end of July 2024, he submitted his 100th life story, for which, due to circumstances, he will receive a certificate and a bouquet today from Alice van Bakkum, the chair of the Foundation, and Kim Huvenaars, the Team Manager of the Research Team. In her speech, Alice van Bakkum complimented Gijs on his dedication and the enjoyable collaboration. She believes that we should celebrate milestones, such as those achieved by Luc Ronde, the editor of the life stories, who recently submitted his 600th edited life story.

Gijs has a lasting memory; he got a tattoo on his arm for the 100th life story: 'I will remember them.'



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### **In Memoriam: Dick Akerboom**

On 21st February 2025 Dick Akerboom passed away. He had been in poor health for some time, but in the end his death was still quite unexpected.



For the Faces to Graves Foundation Dick was a committed Vice-President, a position which he took on in 2018.

His calm approach and analytical skills combined with his ability to get to the heart of the matter in detail was his special strength.

His characteristic smile too is edged in our memories. He was gentle, yet sharp and critical whenever necessary.

Dick was also closely involved in the work and research carried out by our Research Team, which he followed with great interest.

In addition, he was engaged in the cooperation with the two other Canadian War Cemeteries in the Netherlands, named Canadian War Graves Nederland.

Dick, you will be sorely missed by us, we will remember you!

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### **Commemoration Aubrey Cosens**

On 26th February 2025 it was 80 years ago that Sergeant Aubrey Cosens was one of the men who gave their lives for our freedom. To commemorate his heroic deed and ultimate sacrifice there was a commemoration at the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery on Sunday 2nd March. At the Cross of Sacrifice the Last Post was played and flowers were laid, followed by one minute of silence. At Sergeant Aubrey Cosens' grave flowers were laid as well to honour him.

After the ceremony there was also a commemoration near Mooshof farm, in the vicinity of Uedem (Germany) where Aubrey lost his life at the age of 23. This had been organised by The Royal Canadian Legion -Branch 005 and the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada working group. Here too, the Last Post was played and one minute of silence was observed and flowers and a wreath were laid.





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### **Visit family Wheat**

On Wednesday 9th April, relatives visited the grave of Mike's great-uncle Roland Frederick Wheat. Mike had come over to the Netherlands from Canada with his wife, her sister and friend. It was their first visit to the Netherlands.

They were in touch with our researcher, Bernhard Deeterink, who had written Roland Frederick's life story. As I had recently translated this life story into English, it felt a bit familiar to me when Saskia and I welcomed them to the cemetery at 10.30 am. They had come by taxi from Nijmegen, where they had stayed the night before and were to stay one more day and night. Unfortunately, Saskia had to leave straight away because of another appointment, but I felt honoured to show them around the cemetery, accompany them to the grave and tell them a bit more about the history of the place.

It was only five years ago that Mike had actually heard about his great-uncle being buried in Groesbeek. Roland Frederick Wheat was William Frederick and Pollie Wheat's only son. He had three older sisters. His birthplace was Midland, Ontario, later on the family moved to Toronto. At the age of 26, he died in the

vicinity of the village of Zetten in the Netherlands. He was a driver with A Squadron. On that fateful day, 18th January 1945, Trooper Roland Frederick Wheat was joined by Major Brandy Conrol in his Scout car for deliberations with the Leicestershire Regiment. On their way, they were shot at, and a heavy explosive hit the vehicle. Due to this explosion, the driver, Roland Frederick Wheat, lost his life.

The Wheat family were visibly impressed when they were standing at Roland Frederick Wheat's grave. Mike told me that his great-uncle's death (he was his grandfather's brother) was not talked about a lot in his family. That he was now standing at his great-uncle's grave meant a lot to him and his wife.

Mike had also written down Douglas Walter Reid's grave number. Reid too was from Midland, Ontario. They also put a small flag at his grave, like they had done at Roland Frederick's grave. When they saw the gardeners taking care of the maintenance of the cemetery.

An hour later, they got back into the taxi that was to take them to the Freedom Museum. Later that day Bernhard sent us a photo that he had received, in which the four of them were standing near the monument at another memorable World War II spot: the Nijmegen bridge, called 'De Oversteek'. A visit to Amsterdam in the days to come was part of their itinerary too.

On leaving, they expressed their gratitude for all the work that Faces to Graves are doing for the soldiers and their families. They thanked me for the time and trouble I had taken to show them around. The fact that I had been able to give them some more information on this memorable place, especially now in these turbulent times, left me with a feeling of satisfaction.

*Gonny van Hal*



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### **'Forgotten Liberation' of Arnhem**

Great initiative Faces to Graves volunteers Amanda and Maikel Slotboom.



In April 1945, members of the 49th West Riding 'Polar Bear' Division under the command of Major General Stuart Rawlins, with support from the Canadian artillery, fought to liberate the empty city of Arnhem.

Because there were no civilians left in Arnhem, our liberators were unfortunately not received by a grateful crowd, waving flags and throwing flowers. Instead, they took part in brutal house-to-house fighting, at the cost of 66 allied lives, including 4 Canadians).

After 80 years, that 'forgotten liberation' was commemorated by the Committee Forgotten Liberation on Sunday 13 May in the hall of the city hall in Arnhem.

Alice van Bekkum and Saskia Peters laid a wreath on behalf of Faces to Graves.



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### **Maple syrup surprise**

My friendship with Bill Murphy originated on Sunday 30 April 2023 at 'The Faces of Groesbeek 2023'. On that day, I was hosting and saw that he was busy with goodies and a note with names on it. After I asked if I might be able to help him, a big smile came upon his face. We then walked around the Canadian Cemetery in Groesbeek for over two hours, visiting all the graves he had on his note. How glad we were that we managed to do it just before his bus was due to leave for the hotel again. Together we had a good feeling about that afternoon, we didn't finish talking.

A few days later on 4 May, I saw him again at the National Commemoration at the Canadian Cemetery in Groesbeek. Again, we couldn't stop talking and



laughing so happy to see each other again. A friendship for life it seemed even though we only saw each other for the second time at the cemetery!

After that, we kept emailing each other, calling each other, sending stuff and cards. Last February, Bill called me again, when I see his name on my display I smile from ear to ear. We then tell each other how our families and dogs are doing. Almost at the end of our conversation, Bill says he wants to send me something, but that he still has to figure out how to get it sent to me. The question marks in my head take on big shapes, so I tell Bill it's OK and that he's already doing enough for me. Then Bill mentions that he also wants to give Maple Syrop to my colleagues at FTG and the gardeners who work at the Canadian Cemetery in Groesbeek and if I would make sure they get it.

I find that such a beautiful and incredibly sweet gesture that I can only exclaim that of course I want to do that for him! Meanwhile, weeks have passed and preparations for 'The Faces of Groesbeek 2025' are in full swing. As I am working for FTG on Tuesday evening 22 April, I receive a call from Joyce Verhoeven Honorary Consul of the Dutch Embassy in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

She tells me that she was approached by Bill Murphy and that he passed on my contact details to her. The Dutch Embassy has decided to start helping Bill with the transport of the Maple Syrop. Below is the letter that came with the four boxes of the transport from Canada to the Netherlands:

*April 23, 2024*

*To Whom It May Concern:*

*I am writing to advise that I have provided the shipper (Mr. William Murphy of Hartz Point, Nova Scotia) with assistance to ship 4 cases (each containing 12 jugs of maple syrup) to the consignee, Ms. Saskia Peters of Groesbeek, NL. The shipment is a personal donation from Mr. Murphy to the volunteers of the Faces to Graves non-profit organization at the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery to thank them personally for the work they are doing. For additional information see <https://www.facestograves.nl/>*

*Mr. Murphy (80 yrs old) served as a radio and telegraph operator in the Canadian army and is member of the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals. He continues to work with veterans and keeps the spirit of remembrance and gratitude top of mind. During his last Liberation tour of the Netherlands in 2023, he met Ms. Saskia Peters and wants to personally extend his gratitude with a gift of maple syrup for each of the volunteers. He is unable to travel at this time due to his wife (81 yrs) having some health issues.*

*The gifts of maple syrup will be distributed as part of the 80th anniversary events for the Liberation of the Netherlands at the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery & Memorial. If you require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.*

*Best regards and met vriendelijke groet,  
Joyce P D M Hoeven*

*Honorary Consul of the Kingdom of the Netherlands  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
CANADA*

Boxes can be collected at Schiphol/Amsterdam on Sunday 27 April. There, the above letter by Joyce Verhoeven, will be read by several staff members of Cargo Handler Department and Customs Headquarters at Schiphol. In the process, many tears are dried by the staff working there of emotion and appreciation. By now, most of the Maple Syrop has been distributed, some volunteers are still awaiting it.

Hereby I would like to personally thank Bill for this huge token of appreciation! Every time I handed over a bottle of Maple Syrop and told this story, I saw smiles appearing on faces and also regularly a tear of emotion passing by.

I would also like to thank Joyce Verhoeven, Honorary Consul of the Dutch Embassy in Halifax, for all the work she did to make the shipment from Canada to the Netherlands possible. The expressions of appreciation also made the entire team of volunteers and board of FTG and the gardeners of the Groesbeek Canadian Cemetery (CWGC) feel incredibly good.

*Saskia Peters*



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## **THE FACES OF GROESBEEK**

### **Preparing and placing photos**

Placing of the photos was preceded by a long preparation. The project group met several times and the new photos were prepared for the printer.

In advance we were allowed to set up a display case in the reception area of the town hall, in which Jacqueline and Chris Bouwhuisen displayed items related to Faces to Graves and the event The Faces of Groesbeek.

Jacqueline Bouwhuisen put together a nice video of this:

[Preparing The Faces of Groesbeek 2025](#)

On Friday 25 March, all the photos were placed at the graves. During this work, several Canadian families arrived, and they were now able to place the photo of their family member themselves. These were unexpectedly emotional moments.

#### [Placing photos The Faces of Groesbeek 2025](#)

In the week leading up to the official opening, Faces to Graves hosts welcomed the many visitors every day. In the Netherlands it was already school holidays, which is why we added this extra week.









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### **Opening exhibition Indigenous Liberators**

On May 1, the temporary exhibition 'Indigenous Liberators' was opened at the Freedom Museum by H.R.H. Princess Margriet. Dr. Mathilde Roza collaborated with the museum to create this exhibition, which will be on display until November 30.

Saskia Peters and Alice van Bekkum were among the attendees. After all the speeches, several impressive performances took place. We met Vanessa Kirtz, who is participating in our school project, in person for the first time.



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### **Book presentation Faces of Liberation**

On May 2, the presentation of the book 'Faces of Liberation' took place in the Freedom museum, which was simultaneously published in Dutch. Dr. Frank Mehring and Dr. Jaap Verheul invited various stakeholders, including the chair of Faces to Graves, Alice van Bekkum, who was presented with the very first copy. Faces to Graves worked with them in the preparation of this book.

The book is for sale at the Freedom Museum and local bookstores and to be ordered via [aup.nl](http://aup.nl) and Amazon.ca.



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## Opening ceremony The Faces of Groesbeek

On May 2nd at 3:00 PM the opening ceremony of The Faces of Groesbeek began. A large Canadian delegation and 21 Canadian veterans were present, a very special event!



We would like to thank **everyone** who contributed to this ceremony; without all your effort it would not have been possible for everything to go so smoothly. Chapeau!



Too much to mention, the photos and videos below say more than words:

- [Live CNC broadcast](#)
- [Global News](#)
- [RNZ](#)
- [Around May 2](#)













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## Reports from volunteers

So many special encounters, so many people I unfortunately didn't speak to, it was a roller-cast of emotions on this special day, which is etched in my memory.

*Alice van Bekkum*



*Kurt Johnson*



*Barbara Wood*



*Superintendent Clare Smart*



*Donna Maxwell*



*Paul Bickerton*



*Mark Cosens*

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What struck me in particular was the huge interest shown by old and young people from at home and abroad. The many preparations made the cemetery look beautiful, also thanks to the gardeners. The flowers started blooming and the sun did the rest. What I remember most vividly is a group of German pupils visiting the cemetery. They were staying in IJsselsteyn and, together with their supervisors, they paid a visit to the Canadian War Cemetery on 30th April.

Else and I had the honour of welcoming them and we saw a lot of respect and interest among the youngsters. After Else gave them more background information on the cemetery, they had lots of questions and quietly walked



around the cemetery on their own. No mobile phones, no fuss and at the same time showing a lot of kindness and gratitude.

We were invited to join them to Kekerdom, where they visited the War Monument and were served lunch. They also attended presentations and performances in the local Kulturhus. We listened to a very moving story of Belle, who was the child of a Canadian soldier and a Dutch mother, who only met her father in the 1990s. This story deeply impressed us, the pupils in particular were moved by it.



The hundreds of Canadian visitors to the cemetery also brought about a lot of emotion. They were often touched and especially grateful for the work carried out by the volunteers and the attention paid to the graves and stories of their young countrymen.

Lest We Forget.

Poem that Corporal Murray Emery Wood had with him when he died:

### **THE PLACE THAT GOD FORGOT**

*(author unknown)*

God could of and worked another day,  
And spent it here quite well.  
But I guess he left the place this way,  
To show a part of Hell.

The sand is over ten feet deep,  
The sun is scorching hot.  
They call this place, Camp Borden,  
The place that God forgot.

### **The answer from England.**

You claim God could have worked another day,



And spent it in your camp quite well.  
Why in Camp Borden, Boys, it's Heaven.  
It's England, now it's Hell.

The sun doesn't shine now in England,  
It's carries on through slush and mud.  
And it's better to walk through sand, Boys,  
Thank to walk through human blood.

It's not what you want to do in England,  
It's do it, like it or not,  
And when Victory is jointly our's  
You will know, Boys  
God hasn't forgot.

In England, it's wire or phone  
But you boys in Camp Bordon  
Take a train and go home.  
Mother here smiling to cover their fears  
Biting their lips to keep back their tears  
While sons in England in the  
dangerous spot  
Your boys in Camp Bordon claim God forgot.

You should thank God you are there Boys  
Where you really know the world called peace  
Where the bombs are not dropped around you  
Or the air raid alarms never cease.

God has done wonders for that camp, Boys,  
And done His job quite well  
In keeping a spot called Canada  
From the blackouts of war and Hell.

So carry on, and chins up, Boys  
Thank God for the freedom you've got  
For when peace rings out on a midnight clear  
Remember God hasn't forgot.  
The End.

There is little information about the poem. A newspaper article (undated) from the archives of the Kawartha Lake Public Library, Amy Cosh scrapbook, page 111, said it was written by a soldier named Morton at Saint John New Brunswick.

*Liesbeth Huisman-Arts*

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On 2nd May 'The Faces of Groesbeek' event was opened. After the official part I had the honour of accompanying one of the relatives to his or her family member's grave.

In my case, this was Joann Pellerin, the daughter of Rocco Andrew Speziali's, whose life story I had written. Joann never saw her father, as he left to England approx. two months before she was born.

On this occasion, Joann placed a photo of her father next to his grave, which was an emotional moment. What is very special is that Joann lives 'only' two streets away from my niece in Edmonton.

This niece also let me know that the recordings that CBC had made at the cemetery were broadcast live on TV. A beautiful way for Faces to Graves to present themselves.

*Henk Mostert*

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In early May, the Oranjecomité Hoogland hosted a delegation from the West Nova Scotia Regimental Association, which included six post-war veterans and their partners. Four soldiers from the West Novas lost their lives during the liberation of Hoogland. On May 2, the delegation visited the Canadian War Cemetery in Groesbeek alongside the Oranjecomité Hoogland.

Before the opening ceremony of 'The Faces of Groesbeek,' Canadian and regimental flags were placed at the graves of the four WNSR soldiers.

Our West Novas were very pleased to see that a life story featuring a photo of all four fallen West Novas, who are buried in Groesbeek, is included in the Digital Monument of Faces to Graves.

They also attended the opening ceremony. For the Oranjecomité Hoogland, it was very special that Kyle Leathers was allowed to place a photo at the grave of his great-uncle Edmond Levesque, who died in Hoogland on his 21st birthday.

*Piet Smink*



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Bob and Brenda Hall from Edmonton, capital of the province of Alberta in Canada, visited the cemetery in Groesbeek and attended the opening ceremony on May 2. Bob is the son of David Everett's brother Lloyd.

They actually wanted to come four years ago, but due to the corona issues this was not possible. Brenda had difficulty walking and was in hospital in England for a while during their stay in Europe.

They felt it was an honour to be present at the Canadian cemetery, and they are very grateful for the work that Faces to Graves does. Bob proudly placed the photo of Corporal David Cecil Everett Hall who was fatally shot by a sniper on March 31, 1945 in Germany.

His life story is in the Digital Monument: [David Everett](#)

*Gijs Krist*

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As some of you know, I do not live in the Netherlands. However, I did know well in advance that I was going to go to Groesbeek during the period of the commemorations and the opening ceremony on 2nd May, as friends from Canada, the Isfeld family and the Cooper family, were coming too.

Both families have family members who are buried at the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery. Einar Isfeld (Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada) is Dennis' father. His father got severely wounded in Netterden and died of his injuries in Bedburg Hau on 6th April 1945.

Robert James McDonald (Queen's Own Rifles of Canada) died in the vicinity of Uedem on 5th March 1945. He is Cleve and Gail Cooper's father. On 3rd May I took them to a number of places where their family members had been too. We started off in Nijmegen, at a spot that we had a photo of. This was a photo of

Tom Cooper, also related, who survived the war. The photo was taken at the former army barracks in Nijmegen. It was a cozy, yet emotional day, which was concluded on the spot where Robert James McDonald got killed, which was an emotional moment for the Coopers.



Before my departure to the Netherlands, I had posted a number of messages on our Facebook page. There was a lot of response, in particular to the video of the preparations of the exhibition. So far there have been 375 responses, most of them short, sometimes with a story.

I have read all these messages, which I shared with you at an earlier date. They included thank you messages from family members, but also requests for photographs of the graves. In our app group I asked for volunteers' help to provide me with photographs and I can say that the families are very grateful for this. So, when I drove to the Netherlands, I had a list of names, including my soldiers' names, that I was going to take a photo of. I had also printed a number of photographs, which had reached me last-minute through FB or through the contact persons of the soldiers I was doing research on.

The 2nd May started off well at the cemetery. I was there early and received a message from my old friend that he was also on his way. So, on arrival, my old friend Nick Janicki was already at the cemetery, 101 years old, but still going strong, although he indicated that walking was becoming more and more difficult. I met him a number of years ago after I, together with a colleague, had written down David Janicki's life story. We showed Nick around the cemetery and pointed the spot out to him where his brother David got killed near the Thornse Molen on 8th February 1945.

Embracing him at the cemetery stirred up emotional feelings in me. His son David was with him too, beautiful moments.





After this meeting I spent the next two hours taking photographs of various graves. As I had not ordered my list of graves logically, I had to walk up and down the cemetery in order to take 45 pictures. I spent the rest of the day sitting in the shade of a tree following the ceremony and talking to interesting people. I finally had the opportunity to meet some Faces to Graves people as well, so I now have names with faces, as I only knew most of them through WhatsApp. It was nice meeting you all.

In the meantime, I have forwarded most of the photos to relatives, who thank us all for the work we do. There is one name I want to mention in particular, namely that of Christine House, 80 years old and living in England. She would have liked to come over, but she walks with difficulty and unfortunately there was no one to accompany her on this trip. She never knew her father, Gerald Schwartz, as he departed to Europe before she was born. In 2004 Christine buried her mother's ashes, next to Gerald's grave, which was done with CWGC's permission. She was emotionally touched when I sent her the photo with the grave and the photo with her father in it and the one with Gerard and Irene in it that I had received from her. She sent me heart-felt words and, if her health permits, she still intends to come later this year.

*Bernhard Deeterink*

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When I reflect on the past few weeks, a range of feelings comes to mind. First and foremost, gratitude: during our opening ceremony on May 2, 2025, we welcomed 21 veterans from World War II, along with many family members of fallen and missing soldiers, to the Canadian Cemetery in Groesbeek.

Thanks to the live broadcast made possible by CBC News Canada, many more people were able to watch it "live." The overwhelming reactions from Canada and around the world afterwards indicate that this was truly an enormous enrichment for many viewers. I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to CBC News in particular, as well as to Veterans Affairs Canada.

Emotion also plays a role: the veterans from World War II are brought into the cemetery in Groesbeek and positioned in the shade of the trees at the entrance. I was able to briefly hold each of their hands to express my gratitude. Freedom is a simple word, yet so precious!

The youngest is 96 years old, and the oldest is 105. The rest of the men are between these ages. However, what happens has nothing to do with their age; it relates entirely to their memories from 80 years ago. They emerge as "young boys," and that brings tears to my eyes.

*However, let's return to the beginning*

The placement of the photos, which will take place on Friday, April 25, 2025. It is still quite cold and heavily overcast that day, but the entire team of volunteers looks forward to it. We will stay until all the photos are placed at the graves and in the Memorial, working diligently. In the days that follow, the sun comes out and shines for almost the entire three weeks of The Faces of Groesbeek.

*Monday, May 5*

80 Years of Freedom! It's a beautiful, sunny day, and we're excited to welcome many visitors. In the afternoon, we are surprised by a visit from Governor General Mary Simon. Many Canadian visitors are beaming with joy; in fact, all the visitors notice it. It's wonderful to see that commemoration can happen

anytime and anywhere, and everyone celebrates it in their own way. Rank or status is not essential; what matters is continuing to commemorate the past.

*Then comes the final day*

Sunday, May 18, 2025. We have organized a closing ceremony in collaboration with Nijmegen4Ukraine. Faces to Graves has discovered Canadian soldiers of Ukrainian descent during the research. The choir Phoenix performs Ukrainian songs that resonate deeply, and the personal stories of Mark and Ivan Pryimenko touch many hearts.

I want to thank everyone once again who helped make The Faces of Groesbeek 2025 a success. It can be something small or something big; together, we make each other stronger, and that creates a connection. That alone is something we can be proud of, and I also see it as a tribute to the "men" of the Canadian Cemetery.

I was also a hostess this year during The Faces of Groesbeek. I enjoy doing this—making contact with the visitors and meeting the family members of the soldiers. Feeling the "spirit" of the fallen men creates a connection that is incredibly inspiring to me, and time and time again, it provides a moment of reflection.

*Saskia Peters*

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### **National Remembrance Day May 4**

The National Remembrance Day was held by the municipality of Berg en Dal on May 4 at the Canadian War Cemetery.

After a silent march from the town hall, in which many Canadians participated, an impressive commemoration followed.

Alice van Bekkum and Saskia Peters laid the wreath on behalf of Faces to Graves.



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## **Visit by Governor General Mary Simon**

2025, for us the 3rd time hosting The Faces of Groesbeek event. This time during the 80-year commemoration of the liberation of the Netherlands!

The previous 2 editions of TFoG were already fantastic. It is such a special event. We never know what visitors we are going to get, and how many will come. But almost every visitor creates a beautiful moment of connection and human interaction. Many people are up for a chat; the most wonderful stories are shared. People reminisce about wartime memories and tell personal stories. Conversations are accompanied by a smile and a tear. Every time our service is over, we don't want to go home.... It always makes our hearts happy, and we feel we have grown as a person again after a beautiful day at the cemetery. What does make us a little small and humble every time is that people are so touched by seeing all the pictures. Especially when Canadian people come to thank us emotionally. That feels to us a little like it should be the other way around. We are grateful for our freedom for which their families and countrymen died. The posted photos clearly give a real face and personality to the name on the headstone, even for people who have no relation to the soldier at all, they are touched because they see a person, instead of just a name.

This year was exceptionally well attended. One bus with Canadian visitors had not yet left, or the next buses were already arriving at the parking lot. We also met a Canadian family from Quebec, whose uncle is buried in Groesbeek. Faces to Graves does not yet have a photo of the soldier in question. Email contact has been made with the family, and hopefully together we will make sure their uncle is remembered with a life story and photo. That's what we do it for!

Right now, the situation in the world is very unstable, which is also often a topic of conversation among visitors. That makes you think, visitors of all nationalities feel connected to each other as human beings. We meet in a place that makes it clear what great suffering conflicts cause. Ordinary people do not want war or conflict. How is it possible that there are so many of us with our hearts and minds in the right place? And yet there are always those few rulers in the world who gain enough support to cause such conflicts... How?

We had wonderful moments again, 1 of which also had a personal touch. My (Kim) mother has incurable cancer and came to visit us. Right on the day the Governor General Mary Simon came to visit our event unexpectedly. Her attendant asked if I wanted to meet her and my mother said to me, shall I take pictures? The attendant asked, who are you? I am her proud mom, my mom replied. And then we were photographed together with the Governor General and her husband, and the attendant took the picture. I don't know who glowed with most pride in that photo. But now this memory will remain forever connected in our hearts with Canada and Groesbeek.

*Kim Huvenaars en Robert*



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### **Surprise visit by Governor-General**

On Monday afternoon, 5 May, Governor General Mary Simon and her husband Whit Fraser paid a surprise visit to the Canadian War Cemetery in Groesbeek.

It was a busy afternoon, many visitors visited 'The Faces of Groesbeek' and all were pleasantly surprised to see the Governor General there accompanied by Canadian Ambassador Hugh Adsett.

She visited many graves and also at 'The Cross of Sacrifice' she gave her tribute to all the men buried or missing in the Memorial at the Canadian Military Cemetery in Groesbeek.

The volunteers of the Faces to Graves foundation and the many visitors were really surprised and impressed by this event.

*Saskia Peters*



*Photos © OSGG, 2025, photographer MS Anne-Marie Brisson, Rideau Hall*

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### **Book launch residency Canadian Ambassador**

On May 7, the board of Faces to Graves was invited by The Netherlands Atlantic Association, the Canadian Embassy, Radboud University and Utrecht University for a presentation by editors Prof. Frank Mehring and Jaap Verheul about the book *Faces of Liberation*. This took place at the residence of the Canadian Ambassador in Wassenaar.

The presentation was concluded with a discussion about the changing role of NATO and transatlantic partnerships in the current security situation, with Marjan Kamstra (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and Marjanne de Kwaasteniet (former Dutch ambassador to NATO).

Saskia Peters and Alice van Bekkum also met the students who worked on the life stories and the designer of the book.





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### **Commemoration of soldiers of Ukrainian descent**

On Sunday 18 May, Faces to Graves, in collaboration with Liliya Levandovska of Nijmegen4Ukraine and with the support of Florian Gödderz, municipality of Berg en Dal, organised a commemoration at the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, where we remembered the Canadian soldiers of Ukrainian descent.

In the context of 80 years of Freedom, we connected the past with the present and showed the price that was paid for our freedom.

Mayor Mark Slinkman of Berg en Dal gave a speech, that showed involvement, followed by the representatives of the Ukrainian and Canadian embassies, Mrs. Nataliia Holub and Richard Martin-Nielsen. Alternated with the Ukrainian choir Phoenix that sang Ukrainian songs. The speech of Andriy Siromakha, a young inspiring Ukrainian soldier, who is recovering in the Netherlands, made a great impression. Afterwards, all those present laid blue/yellow flowers at the 58 graves.







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## Comments visitors The Faces of Groesbeek

16-5-2025

Wij waren al 53 jaar in Groesbeek en zijn hier al water geweest. Maar nu met al die foto's, is het erg mooi, dat er mensen zijn die dat hebben uitgraven.

Bedankt voor al die moeite die jullie hebben gedaan.

Willy en Gaby Janssen

Zeer indrukwekkende begraafplaats en geweldig verzorgd. Complimenten! Vele graven zijn (inmiddels) voorzien van foto's. Dat maakt 't nog ontroerender... dat die -veelal- jonge levendige 'snuutjes' je aankijken.

Wat is oorlog toch verschrikkelijk! Maar wij moeten deze strijders voor onze vrijheid blijven herinneren! Ook na 80 jaar.

14 mei 2025

Dick en Thea Jagtenberg  
-Eikhout  
Land van Maas & Waal

We have lived in Groesbeek for 53 years and have been here many times.

But now with all these photos, it is very nice that there are people who have researched this.

Thanks for all the effort you have made!

Very impressive cemetery and wonderfully maintained! Compliments!

Many graves have (now) been provided with photos.

That makes it even more moving.... that those - mostly - young, lively 'faces' look at you.

How terrible war is!

But we must continue to remember these fighters for our freedom!

Even after 80 years

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## Meeting Vanessa Kirtz – Alice van Bekkum

Meeting Vanessa Kirtz was a long-cherished wish, finally I could give her that personal 'hug' that she definitely deserves! Also meeting Kurt Johnston, who edits the life stories of the students, felt like we are related.

Vanessa's commitment to Faces to Graves is greatly appreciated by everyone, as is evident from the reactions of her students who have put it on paper. But the families she found are also full of praise.

I find all of that in the book that Vanessa put together for me, a special gift from a special friend!



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## **Report Vanessa Kirtz**

Having just recently returned from the Netherlands, where I attended the 80th Anniversary of the Liberation, I have had some time to reflect on this once a lifetime experience. I was honoured to be asked to represent my school and the over 300 students who have written life stories. My journey began when I luckily flew on the same plane as 21 Canadian WWII veterans. Upon landing, we received a warm welcome from the Dutch, including an official escort and a water cannon salute.

My first stop was the Freedom Museum in Groesbeek, where I attended the opening of the "Indigenous Liberators Exhibit." This important exhibition, created by Dr. Mathilde Roza, highlighted the contributions of Indigenous WW2 soldiers from North America. Hearing Indigenous speakers share their family stories was incredibly moving, especially witnessing a jingle dance and throat singing. It was at this event where I had the pleasure of meeting Alice van Bekkum, co-founder and President of Faces to Graves, after years of collaboration via email.

Next, I visited the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, laying cards at the gravesites of soldiers my students had researched, some of which included heartfelt messages from current students.

On May 2, I attended the launch of the book *Faces of the Liberation*, featuring vignettes from our school's work and shared a few words about our project. Following the book launch, I was honoured to have the opportunity to participate in the Faces of Groesbeek ceremony by speaking on behalf of students and families that have been impacted by the work of Faces to Graves. The event was emotional, with many veterans and families in attendance and I received touching responses to my speech. A highlight of my trip was meeting families of the soldiers my students researched after the ceremony. They placed photos at their loved ones' graves — a heartfelt gesture.

The families were given the photo of their loved one to place at their grave. It was a very thoughtful gesture and a moving moment. On the right is Paul Bickerton placing the photo at his uncle's grave. We also met Janice Richardson who is the niece of James Cadzow and with Brian Akitt whose uncle is soldier Lloyd Wilson) after the ceremony.

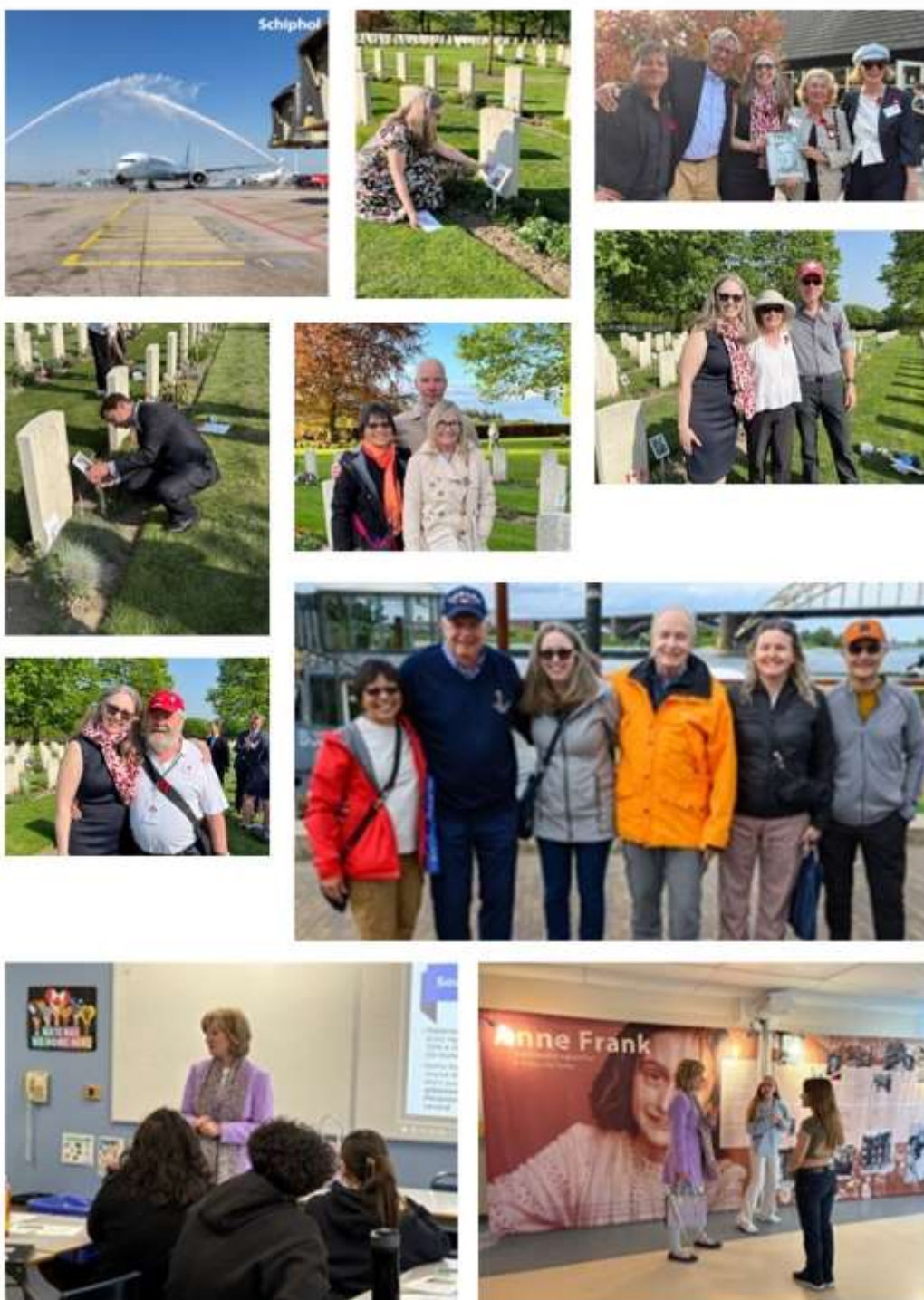
It was wonderful to share this experience with our editor/researcher Kurt Johnson. Thankfully, he was able to attend the ceremony at Groesbeek. Kurt has edited each and every one of the 189 life stories that were written by my students. This project would not have been possible without him.

On May 4, volunteers Jimmy Jimbo and Tjarco Schuurman were our personal guides who drove us around to visit the locations that soldiers, whom my students have researched, fought and were killed. It was incredibly powerful to stand where they stood over 80 years ago - especially at the Hochwald Gap in Germany. We then ended the day by participating in the silent march to Groesbeek Cemetery, culminating in a moving ceremony with speeches, music, and wreath-laying.



Upon returning to Canada, my class and I welcomed Her Excellency Margriet Vonno, Dutch Ambassador, to our history class, where students shared their research stories and walked her through the Anne Frank exhibit borrowed from the Anne Frank House. This was a perfect bookend to the events I had attended during my trip as this journey was a profound reminder for me of the sacrifices made for freedom and the bonds between Canada and the Netherlands.

[Video Vanessa](#)



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### **Meeting Research Team**

The Faces of Groesbeek is over again, all photos are back in storage. After an intensive time culminating in the opening ceremony, together with Veteran Affairs Canada who brought 21 veterans, peace is now slowly returning.

On Saturday morning, June 24, Faces to Graves celebrated: the foundation exists 10 years. During the Research Team meeting, there was coffee with a beautiful cake. What followed was a complete surprise for the president Alice van Bekkum.

From the hands of Else Schaberg and Liesbeth Huisman she received a beautiful glass stand with the dates and the logo of Faces to Graves, together with a beautiful bouquet of flowers and a card with a personal poem.

And that while she herself also had some surprises in store for a few others. For example, Gonny van Hal, English translator, received the Faces to Graves coin along with a certificate, presented by Alice van Bekkum and board member Saskia Peters. On this coin, designed by De Tinnen Roos from Millingen, is Major Willard Bruce Parker, of the North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment, his life story is in the Digital Monument at [facestograves.nl](http://facestograves.nl).

Gonny, former English teacher volunteered in early 2022 and now has more than 100 translations of life stories and many newsletters to her name. Her modesty, warm commitment and dedication also in other areas, such as hostess during the photo event, are much appreciated.

Pieter and Daria Valkenburg, a Dutch/Canadian couple from Prince Edward Island were invited as guests before they fly back to Canada on Monday. They too were presented with the Faces to Graves coin for years of cooperation with Faces to Graves. They have already found several families for Faces to Graves. But best of all, they have already traced over 100 hard-to-find photos. Together they have a blog called, "On the War Memorial Trail" which commemorates various soldiers from World War I and World War II.

Last but not least, someone we know best behind a camera: Jacqueline Bouwhuisen, for many years a volunteer at broadcaster Berg en Dal, but now as a volunteer media for Faces to Graves. Together with her husband Chris they have made beautiful recordings around The Faces of Groesbeek. And that certainly deserves a flower! Both have made wonderful impressions of this event for us. Check out the videos on our YouTube channel.



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### **Retrospective with Mayor Slinkman**

On Thursday 5 June, Mayor Mark Slinkman and Alice van Bekkum, chair of the Faces to Graves foundation, looked back on the busy period surrounding the commemorations at the beginning of May. But the 10th anniversary of the foundation was also discussed. The mayor has been very involved with Faces to Graves from the beginning.

Due to all the hustle and bustle surrounding the celebrations of 80 years of Liberation, it was not possible for the mayor to attend the book presentation.

Today, Mayor Mark Slinkman was presented with the book 'Faces of Liberation' by the chair of the foundation.

This richly illustrated book brings their stories to life. Who were these young men who gave their lives for freedom, democracy and peace. It discusses the history of the cemetery and the role of the Canadian contribution to the liberation of the Netherlands. But also the warm relations between the Netherlands and Canada and our duty of honour to keep the memories alive. This is not only a historical document, but also a tribute to the soldiers, as Faces to Graves shows in the Digital Monument on [www.facestograves.nl](http://www.facestograves.nl)

Faces to Graves contributed to this book and 117 of our life stories are included. You will also find the complete list of names at the back of the book. Both for the cemetery and for the Memorial, with the names of all missing soldiers.



This book was compiled by Dr. Frank Mehring and Dr. Jaap Verheul of Radboud University; it is for sale in the local bookstore and in the Freedom Museum.



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### **Donations**

On May 5th we received a special donation of 2816 euros from Mr. Josef Janssen, exactly as many euros as there are graves. Thank you very much!

The appreciation of many visitors during the photo event was evident from a total of 975 euros that they donated to us, a nice boost for our volunteers!

Liberation Tours donated 1000 euro for the event; we appreciate that very much!

Our thanks go to the grandson of Albert de Jong, who attended the book presentation and the opening ceremony, he donated 250 euros.

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### **Thank you so much for your donation!**

As a non-profit organization, we can only work on this project through your donation. You can find our sponsors' logos on our website. Sometimes we feel like thanking a donor personally. Unfortunately, we can only do so when we have a contact address. Therefore, we would like to take this opportunity to thank EVERYONE for their contribution!

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### **Special thanks to...**

We thank Richard Meeussen of restaurant-hotel 't Zwaantje in Mook for his hospitality for the Research Team meetings. He has been providing us with a beautiful meeting room free of charge for many years where the coffee is already invitingly waiting for us.

For the various reports in this newsletter we thank: Alice van Bekkum, Bernhard Deeterink, Gonny van Hal, Liesbeth Huisman, Kim Huvenaars, Vanessa Kirtz, Gijs Krist, Henk Mostert, Saskia Peters and Piet Smink.

Sources of photos used: Henk Baron, Alice van Bekkum, Paul ten Broeke, Lilian Eshuis, Peter Hendriks, Fred Hulsman, Kim Huvenaars, Frank Mehring, Vanessa Kirtz, Gijs Krist, Saskia Peters, Veteran Affairs Canada and photos visit Governor General with permission of OSGG.

Gonny van Hal and Ria Lap took care of the translation of the items in this newsletter and Tefke van Dijk, former ResearchTeam member, took care of the layout. Many thanks for that! Julie Allen has been handling the mailing of this newsletter since 2019 and it runs like clockwork, Julie thank you!

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### **Wanted: board members**

Would you like to help us or do you know someone who is interested, we are still looking for:

- board member from the Nijmegen region, to strengthen our board

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**Finally, we wish you all a wonderful summer.**

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Questions or comments? Please contact us: [info@facestograves.nl](mailto:info@facestograves.nl)

