

WHAT LIBERATION DAY “BEVRIJDINGS DAG” MEANS TO ME A BRIEF-PERSONAL EXPERIENCE DURING WWII

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The Liberation of the Netherlands was completed by the First Canadian Army, and on the 5th of May 1945, Canadian Army, Lieutenant-General Foulkes, accepted the Unconditional Surrender of the Nazi-German Forces occupying the Netherlands at Hotel De Wereld in Wageningen, a city situated 20-km west of my home-town of Arnhem, the Capital City of the Province of Gelderland. The formal German surrender was signed on May 7th at Reims in France.

The Netherlands had been occupied since the tragic Bombing Blitz of the City of Rotterdam on the 10th of May 1940. Arnhem became famous after the disastrous failure of Operation Market Garden, when the British Airborne Division tried to capture the Bridge over the river Rijn (Rhine) on 17 September 1944. The main purpose of capturing the Bridge was to allow the Canadian Army, which was held-up at the City of Nijmegen, 17-km south of Arnhem, to move north before the famous Hunger-winter of Nov-Apr 1944-45, when thousands of Western-Netherlanders (the Provinces of Noord and Zuid-Holland) starved to death because of the unusually harsh winter and the lack of food. Towards the end of 1944, a Daily-ration of 1-slice of Dry-Bread and perhaps a 1-Small Carrot, Tulip-bulb, Sugar-beet or a small bowl of Soup (mainly water) had been the norm; but this only, when you were lucky enough to have a ration card. According to Nazi-Germany, Jews did not exist, so they were not entitled to ration cards. Whilst the Southern part of the Netherlands was already freed by the Canadian Army, the Northern part was not. The Royal Air-Force and Canadian Air-Force brokered a temporary truce to allow them to Drop Basic food necessities over the still-German occupied portion of the North and South-Holland Provinces. As a three-year-old, I remember the Large Square and Elongated Canisters, with a large-round lid, falling out of the sky at the end of Parachutes. Children and grown-ups ran into the field and quickly opened the Canisters, which contained Hard Crackers and Cans of Dextrose, a sweet powder, which used to stick to my tongue and to the inside my mouth. We did not need the Air-Forces to drop water to soften the Crackers, we had lots of it everywhere in the Netherlands. I remember my family and neighbours still having a lot of those Canisters with Crackers and Dextrose around in the late 1940s, and remember eating these Left-over Crackers on every successive 5th of May, “Bevrijdingsdag”, until we ran-out around 1952.

After the Battle of Arnhem 17-23 Sept 1944, my family and I (Mother, Sister), were forced by the Germans to evacuate to a city named Doetinchem, my Mother’s home-town, 30-km south-east of Arnhem and 20-km north-north-east of Kleve, Reichswald-Germany.

My Sister was in a Baby carriage and I was walking beside it. It took us three-days and two-nights to walk and sleep in ditches, but except for me catching Bronchitis, we arrived at my Grandparents (my mother’s parents) alive and well.

Many books were written, Dutch and English, about the Battle of Arnhem, but the most-famous was written by Cornelius Ryan. And a movie, named “*A Bridge Too Far*”, based on his book, was made at location in 1976, which depicts the partial failure of Operation Overlord of which Market Garden was the last part of the main plan.

My Father and Grandfather, (the Adjutant, WOI, RSM, of the Arnhem Garrison, Dutch Army), were in the Dutch Underground and came home only at night whilst I was asleep and, therefore, never saw them until the end of May 1945. My Father and Grandfather both received Medals for their Service in the Dutch Underground.

I remember, that there was a tremendous Bombardment in Doetinchem on the 21st of March 1945, my Birthday; when 67 or 69 people were killed when the Allied Air-Forces knocked-out the SS-HQ in Doetinchem. My Mother, Grandmother, Sister in baby carriage, and I were on our way to the Central

Kitchen, with Pans, to get our Daily Soup Rations. There was a lot of smoke and fire all around us, I could see the pilots in their Aircraft, I believe they were Typhoons (Tiffies), flying very low over the houses, looking at me and my family as they flew-by. As we continued toward the Central Kitchen, we walked past a lot of rubble and numerous bloated bodies lying on the streets and sidewalks. An abysmal experience for a three-year old, which I will never forget.

The next episode I remember is “Bevrijdingsdag” the 5th of May 1945. People were dancing in the street as “MY CANADIAN ARMY HEROS” drove through the narrow streets of my Mother’s home-town. People were climbing onto the top of the Sherman Tanks, Armoured Cars, Trucks, and-----the famous Bren-gun Carrier. I was almost trampled to death by the crowd, and vividly remember the Driver behind the vertically-right-hand mounted steering wheel, opening the flap of his left-breast-pocket and pulling something silver out of it. He opened the silver wrapping, and-----out came something brown. I did not know what it was until my mother said that it was “Chokolade”. He broke-off a piece, and-----I had my first piece of chocolate from a Canadian Soldier! I was absolutely at awe, and will never forget that day. I found-out later, while serving in the Canadian Army, that it was the Fort-Garry Horse, Canadian Armoured Corps, from Winnipeg, that Liberated and drove through Doetinchem on May 5th, my mother’s home-town. I have photos of the occasion.



The Nederlanden, The Low-Lands, The Netherlands; with an area of approximately 42,000 square kilometres, twice the size of Lake Ontario.

Later, in my early teens, I got more familiar of what these Canadian Army/Men did for the Netherlands and its people, and I swore that when the time comes I would be one of them. Hence, as soon as I graduated from my 3-year Technical College programme as an Optical Instrument-maker, and a one-year apprenticeship, I travelled to the Canadian Embassy in Den Haag, and filled-in an application to Emigrate to Canada. We underwent rigorous IQ and Medical Tests, and six-months later were on our way to Canada, there I found-out that I could not join the Army until I had been in Canada for at least 3-

years. I could not find employment as an Instrument-maker, however, I was fortunate enough to get a job as a Tool-and-die-maker at EMI Cossor at Dartmouth NS.

Whilst working there, I joined the Canadian Army Militia as a Craftsman in RCEME. Because of my vast experience in Optics I managed to join the Regular Army six-months earlier than the required 3-year waiting period. After Basic Training, I received Trades-training, however, I was so advanced in my knowledge of Optics that I was quickly promoted to LCpl, Cpl, Sgt, Staff-Sgt, Warrant Officer, Master Warrant Officer and then Chief Warrant Officer. At the time, I was the youngest in each rank of 4,000 in CFB Gagetown in the 1960s, and I received my CD just before I was promoted to Master Warrant Officer. I was repeatedly pushed to take the Queen's Commission, but I refused to do so because I wanted to remain as a Craftsman to teach Technical Officers and Subordinates the tricks of the trade. However, more importantly, write Technical Manuals on how to maintain, design and test Artillery and Armoured Vehicle, LASER-Optical Systems, Infrared, Thermal and Fighter-aircraft LASER, Thermal-vision and Target Acquisition Systems.

My Generals used to say: Mr Duermeyer, the only time we see you smile is when you are in Coveralls. I used to tell them that I do not expect my subordinates to do anything I cannot do myself, if there is a technical problem I will solve it, and then teach my subordinates how to do the job properly. I received several national and international awards and commendations from the Optical Industry around the world, among them: Zeiss, Leitz, Hensolt, Wild, Rank-Taylor-Hobson, Santa-Barbara IR and Lockheed-Martin.

I am the recipient of three (3) separate Director-General Awards, received the Queen's Warrant, the Queen's Commission, and was invested as a Member in the Order of Military Merit (OMM) by The Governor-General of Canada in 1980.

I am a three-time Cancer survivor. My Wife, Ann, who never smoked or drank alcohol, looked after me during my recovery, passed away unexpectedly from Pancreatic Cancer in July 2014. In Summary, Canada and the Canadian Forces treated me with respect. I obtained all the Goals I set out to achieve in my life when I first met my Liberators of the Canadian Army on "Bevrijdingsdag" 1945.

Thank you Canada, for liberating the Netherlands in 1945 and making my life complete.

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