



SOCIETY OF FRIENDS OF THE AIRBORNE MUSEUM

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NEWSLETTER No. 42

MAY 1991

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Changes in the Committee.

During the General Annual Meeting on March 30th,we had to say good-bye to one of the Committee members,Mr.J.Eijkelhoff.The chairman,Mr.J.Smits,addressed him with the following words,"You are the last member of the original committee and you have experienced the growth of the Society.You were closely involved in all that and it must have given you great pleasure that the initiative taken in 1980 has grown into a Society with more than one thousand members. Whenever the committee proposed some new plans,you asked for lots of details and weighed all the pros and cons,after which you gave your opinion,which was always clear and positive. You have been the stabilizing element in the committee and we are all very grateful for your contributions and support during all those years."

Mr.Eijkelhoff thanked the chairman for his kind words and continued,"For me,the word"Airborne" did not come to life twelve years ago,but 46 years ago when I was a member of the "Orange Battalion" during the Battle of Arnhem.It has always been a part of my life and it still does so now that I am chairman of the judging-committee of the Airborne one-day walking tours. My time in the committee of the Society has been a very happy one."

The new Committee member is Mr.J.Hofman.He told how he had become interested in the Society."I have seen with amazement that it has been possible to build a bridge between what happened in 1944 and the time in which we now live.I have often been inspired by the spirit of the people of Oosterbeek and of the veterans of that Battle.In 1944 the bridge across the Rhine could not be held,but you have managed to keep open a communication between you and hundreds of veterans and their families and in doing so you have built a new kind of bridge.I will be happy to try and help you make this bridge an enduring one."

New representative in Great Britain.

Our representative in Great Britain,Mr.Frank Young,has informed us that he wants to retire from his post.We were sorry that he could not attend our last General Meeting,but the Committee hopes that Mr.Young will soon be able to visit Oosterbeek,so that he can be thanked properly for the many good things he has done for the Society.

The new representative is Mr. E.E.(Ted) Shaw,1 Willow Close,Stilton,Peterborough,Cambridgeshire.We extend a warm welcome to him and wish him very much success!

Excursion.

This year our excursion will pay attention to the events which took place in the most Northern section of the battle zone during the Battle of Arnhem.

This means that we will pay attention to the glider landings North of the Arnhem-Utrecht railway on September 17th and 18th, 1944, the advance route of the 1st Para Battalion and of the battalions of the 4th Para Brigade, the landings at Johannahoeve of the gliders of the Polish Brigade, the actions which took place at Johannahoeve (seen from both British and German sides), the actions along the Dreyenseweg and on the Lichtenbeek. The end of the excursion will be in the Airborne Cemetery, where we will be told about the realization of the cemetery in 1945.

We hope to be able to make use of a number of historic military vehicles which will make it possible to drive on the narrow by-roads in the terrain. An important part of the excursion will take place around Johannahoeve. The larger part of this terrain is nowadays used as the National Sports Centre of the Netherlands Sports Federation. During the summer months, most Saturdays are used by the Federation to hold large sports events. This means that we have had to choose a later date. The provisional date for the excursion has been fixed for Saturday, August 24th.

The next Newsletter will give you detailed information about this excursion. However, you can book for this excursion now by paying f 35,- per person by giro no. 4403641 or bank no. 53.66.21.128 of the "Vereniging Vrienden Airborne Museum" at Oosterbeek. State "Excursion." The sum of f 35,- includes the excursion, coffee, lunch and the excursion-guide. The maximum number of participants is 75. Bookings will be handled in order of receipt of payment. Payments should reach the treasurer before July 16th.

Boat excursion on video.

A video-tape is now available of last year's boat excursion. Copies can be ordered by paying f 50,- on giro no. 4403641 of the Society. State "Video-tape boat excursion."

Exhibition "Calling Sunray."

The exhibition "Calling Sunray, the story of communications during the Battle of Arnhem" was opened on Friday, March 22nd.

The exhibition was officially opened by Colonel M. Tange, Commander of the Communications Training Centre of the Royal Netherlands Army. Colonel Tange spoke of the rôle of communications during military operations in the past and present. He also mentioned the book "Echoes from Arnhem", written by Captain Lewis Golden, erstwhile communications officer with the First British Airborne Division. This book gives a detailed history of the rôle played by different types of communications during the Battle of Arnhem.

A 16 page brochure has been written especially for this exhibition by Mr. W. Boersma. It can be obtained at the Museum and costs f 3,-.

During the period of the exhibition, a communications post, using historic radio apparatus, has been in operation. It was manned by members of VERON, the Netherlands Association for Experimental Radio Research. Just like the entire exhibition, this post drew many visitors, showing that the exhibition was not only informative to people with a historic interest but also to people with more technical hobbies.

Order of Battle of the First British Airborne Division.

Mr. C. van Roekel would like to call our attention to the following:

"For some time now I have been at work to reconstruct the Order of Battle of the First British Airborne Division during the Battle of Arnhem, up to and including platoon level. It includes the names of all the officers and their functions. However, most of the many books I have read give only a few names, with or without their function. There is hardly any cohesion with other platoons, companies or battalions. Hence this research. The Society plans to publish the end-result in order to be able to obtain a clear view of the structure of the entire Division. Many people have already promised their help. This is very good as all information must be verified again and again and the fragmentary data must be combined and put into place in my jigsaw puzzle.

Many names, ranks and functions are already known, but it is their underlying



Members of VERON who gave their assistance during the exhibition "Calling Sunray", posing at the back of the Airborne Museum with a jeep carrying communications apparatus. (Photo: B. de Reus.)

connections (for instance: Johnson, J., Lieutenant, Liaison Officer South Staffords), which keep on to elude me and it is quite a job to bring them together in the right order.

It would be an enormous help if you could send me names, preferably coupled to ranks, units and functions. Please send them to the Airborne Museum, attention of C. van Roekel. Most of the "blanks" I encounter are: the Headquarters and Support Companies of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Para Battalions, the platoon commanders of the 11th Para Battalion, the South Staffords, the HQ Company of 7KOSB and the section commanders of the Royal Artillery.

Till now I have managed to place 652 officers.

I am convinced that many of you can offer me assistance, however small, and I send a special plea for help to our British members who took part in the Battle of Arnhem in September 1944".

Special acquisitions.

The other day, Messrs. H. van der Velden and H. Leydecker donated a number of objects found in the former battlegrounds to the Airborne Museum as a permanent loan. Among these are pieces of equipment belonging to Lt. Col. des Voeux, Commander of the 156th Para Battalion (his compass, his whistle and parts of his binoculars) and to Brigade Major Dawson of the 4th Para Brigade (his compass and his whistle). A very special object is the roll-call list of the RECCE Squadron, found inside a beret which was dug up at Oosterbeek. The collection also contains a number of beret emblems of the 21st Independent Parachute Company and strips with codes of the Royal Corps of Signals. The collection is shown in a show-case on the first floor of the Museum.

Finally, may we remind you of the fact that in the Renkum municipality it is strictly forbidden to carry or operate so-called metal-detectors.

In Memoriam Rose Coombs, MBE.

Rose Coombs, MBE, sadly died in January of this year. She was sixty-nine. During the second world war she was a radar operator in No. 11 Group Fighter Command. After the war she became Special Collections Officer of the Imperial War Museum in London and she became also the greatest authority concerning the history of the first world war. Her guide for the battlefields in Belgium and France, called "Before Endeavours Fade" has become a classic. Moreover, she was also a source of information about the Battle of Arnhem.

She took great care that copies of articles about the Battle were sent to the library at Arnhem, which resulted in the Bibliography of the Battle, compiled by Mr. P. G. Aalbers, growing so large as it did.

She was very much interested in the Airborne Museum, it was she who saw to it that photographs from the Imperial War Museum could be exhibited permanently in the Airborne Museum without the paying of copyright. She visited the Museum many times and every time she declared that our Museum was the best she had ever visited. This was a great compliment coming from one who, till her last illness last year, regularly acted as a guide with battle-field tours in France, Belgium and Holland, together with veterans from both world wars.

Visiting her in the Imperial War Museum was something of a special experience: the floor and the chairs were covered with books and magazines and one was invited just to clear a chair and sit down. It was the same with her desk, she was a small woman and one could hardly see her behind the piles of books and correspondence, so it was a matter of moving one's chair in the right direction in order to see her face.

She talked and smoked incessantly and a certain strength of purpose was needed to steer her back to the original subject of discussion.

We are sad that we will not see her any more and we will remember her with much gratitude.
(A. Groeneweg)

In Memoriam Harold (Dick) Wittingham.

Harold (Dick) Wittingham sadly died on January 9th. He was a regular and faithful visitor of Oosterbeek and a member of our Society for many years.

Dick was one of the parachutists of the first hour and during the Battle of Arnhem he commanded the 3-inch mortar group which is mentioned in the booklet "The Tommies are coming".
(C. van Roekel)

New signposts for the Museum.

Two new signposts have been placed in front of the Airborne Museum. They are clearly visible from the road. The design and execution was in the hands of Mr. H. Deerenberg who works part-time for the Museum, of the Vogel advertising agency at Oosterbeek and of POL Road Beacons of Renkum.