

Saved from oblivion...

(Text tablet)
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Mid-November 1944 the bodies of the Canadian Engineer H.C. Magnusson and the Polish Paratrooper C. Gajewnik their coffins stood in this church for two days. During the Battle of Arnhem both were killed in action on the 26th of September 1944 while crossing the Neder Rhine near Oosterbeek. On the 14th of November they were recovered from the river Lek, here in Tienhoven. Eventually they were buried in Gorinchem.

Alice van Bekkum

• Aan de vergetelheid ontrukkt...

Medio november 1944 hebben in dit kerkgebouw opgebaard gestaan de Canadese ingenieur H.C. Magnusson en de Poolse paratrooper C. Gajewnik. Tijdens de slag om Arnhem zijn beide militairen bij het oversteken van de Nederrijn bij Oosterbeek op 26 september 1944 gesneuveld. Pas op 14 november zijn zij in Tienhoven uit de Lek geborgen en van hier uit in Gorinchem begraven.

ANWB Fonds

Two articles of Paul Will were published in the magazine from 2004-III and 2004-IV. They tell us about the dramatic events, which happened in mid-November in the aftermath of Operation Market Garden in Tienhoven. The contents of these articles are also based on a close co-operation with Mrs Alice van Bekkum. She was born in Giessendam (close to Gorinchem); now living in Milsbeek (close to Nijmegen). She has done a lot of research after the adventures of the above mentioned soldiers, who lost their lives during Operation Market Garden. In the past years new facts are available about the episode described by Paul Will. At our request Alice van Bekkum reports about that.

You also wondered about the story of the above tablet, which is located at the entrance of the St. Nicolaas church in Tienhoven? That is what happened to me in 2002, when I noticed the plaque at the entrance of the General Cemetery at the Vries Robbéweg in Gorinchem. A tablet of the Common Wealth War Graves Commission and at the end that tablet lead to this tablet in Tienhoven... I will not puzzle you any longer, but give you a report as short as possible. After I discovered the grave of the Canadian soldier H.C. Magnusson, I have done my utmost to find out why and how come this grave is in Gorinchem. I learned that he lost his life in the night of 25/26 September 1944. During the evacuation of allies who

got trapped by the Germans during the battle of Arnhem.

Magnusson together with six Canadian Engineers were drowned during the crossings in so-called storm boats with outboard motors. Developed to cross the river with material like a jeep. Just imagine this all happened in very difficult circumstances. It was a pitch dark night; it was raining cats and dogs during a hail of enemy fire. The British Engineers only used paddles; because of this the Canadians were able to evacuate the largest part: 2,400 mostly British and Polish soldiers.

The Polish paratrooper Lance Corporal Czeslaw Gajewnik must have been drowned during this hectic action. One of his comrades told me the storm boat was overloaded with evacuees and Gajewnik did not want to leave his regiment. He clung himself to the side of the boat. But ... he never reached the other side of the river.

Can you imagine that most of the soldiers never learned to swim?

The Canadian and Polish soldiers were missing for almost two months. Until Adrie van den Berg and his friend Hans van Straten saw something floating in the river. They took the rowing boat to see what it was. Adrie was the son of Janus van den Berg, who was the ferryman of the ferry Tienhoven-Jaarsveld. The rowing boat belonged to the ferry. In the days



The rowing boat of ferryman Janus van den Berg.

before bags of wheat were found in the river. Very welcome during the shortage of food in those days; and inside the wheat was dry! The bags probably came from a horse and wagon which was hit before and drifted in the river some days before.

That Monday, 13th of November 1944 the 11-years old boys had to row past the middle of the river to discover the two undressed bodies. The condition was so bad that the boys decided to tie the rope around the bodies instead of the heads. In the strong current they needed all their strength to row back.

They brought the bodies ashore in the area of salmon fishery "De Koekoek". They told father Van den Berg about what happened. He decided not to mention the action of the boys when he reported to the occupying Germans.

Fortunately the identification tags were still on the bodies, so their names could be found. Hans van Straten remembered: "The German soldier came to my Dads house to make a report. When he left, he

broke the glass of the door because he did not notice it!"

Adrie van den Berg told me that he could not eat the next day because of the terrible state of the bodies.

The Germans ordered a carpenter to make two coffins. Inside covered with lead. This is necessary for victims of drowning.

Hans van Straten's father was the verger of the St.Nicolaas church in Tienhoven. Hans still knows exactly where the two coffins were standing in the church. After two days the Germans took them away. The boys in Tienhoven never knew where they were buried.

After some research I learned that the German Garrison commander was stationed in Gorcum. Presumably he ordered to transport the bodies to this town.

Also some German soldiers washed ashore; they were buried at the same time in the General Cemetery at the Vries Robbéweg. I have met a woman who lived opposite the cemetery when she was young; she witnessed the funeral.

In the Canadian Archives Harold Magnusson is documented as a prisoner of war who died November 14th... That must be a misunderstanding. According to the state the bodies were in this is not probable. The German Archives cannot give clearness; most of them were burned during the bombing of Potsdam.

While camping in their holidays Paul Will and his wife biked to the "Old Church" in Oosterbeek. During Operation Market Garden wounded soldiers



Hans van Straten in the church in Tienhoven.
Document National Archives of Canada.

OFFICIAL CANADIAN ARMY OVERSEAS CASUALTY NOTIFICATION			
NUMBER	G-53266	RANK	Sapper
SERVICE UNIT	R.C.E. (CA)		
NAME	MAGNUSON, Harold Cecil		
DATE OF BIRTH	21st	MONTH	April
DAY		YEAR	1922
Date Enlisted:	19-6-42		
MARITAL STATUS	Single		Religion: United Church
NEXT OF KIN AS SHOWN ON M.F.M. 1, 2 & 3 RELATIONSHIP	Mother		NAME Mrs. Emma Magnusson,
ADDRESS	35 Paddeok Street, Saint John, N.B.		ADDRESS D.A.B.
ADDITIONAL PERSON TO BE NOTIFIED	ADDRESS		
PARENTS NAME	ADDRESS (IF SOLDIER (MARKED OVERSEAS))		
AUTHORITY CAS. SIG. NO.	Cauroords - 7256A		H.Q. 405-4-34,075
CASUALTY DETAILS	Previously reported missing in action now officially reported died whilst P.O.W.		DATE date not stated
<u>AMENDMENT AS TO DATE OF CASUALTY</u>			
WESTERN EUROPEAN THEATRE OF WAR			
LAST WILL ATTACHED TO NOTIFICATION TO A. OF E.I.	YES/NO	M.F.M. ATTACHED TO NOTIFICATION TO A. OF E.I.	YES/NO
	MM		
		O/S with R.C.E. 23 Fd Coy	DATE 5-4-45
		S/L2855	<i>Malcolm Lamb</i> OFFICER I/C F
		COPY FOR DOCUMENT FILE	



The Old Church Oosterbeek.

were taken care of in this church from the 10th century. Nowadays the church has become a pilgrimage for the veterans.

Paul told the guide, Henk Duinhoven, that this church looks very much alike the church in Tienhoven. Henk answered: "Tienhoven? This is where two victims from the Battle of Arnhem were recovered from the river Lek!"

Paul, as a member of the Historical Association Ameide-Tienhoven, wanted to know more about that. After he arrived home again he looked out for information. He sent a letter to the webmaster, Richard Heus, of the website www.wargraves.nl asking if he was able to tell more about it.

Richard sent this letter through to me asking if I could contact Paul. I met Richard when he reacted to my request for information about the war grave in the local newspaper in Gorcum (=Gorinchem). He was aware that in the meantime I had gathered a lot of information.

So I contacted Paul and told him about the results of my search. For instance: I had found relatives of Magnusson in Canada. We made an appointment to meet in Tienhoven. That is what happened May 18th 2004 in the garden on the riverside. This garden belonged to Wijna van den Berg. Her houseboat was taken out of the water and put ashore, close to the place where the ferry has been.



They showed an old picture of the ferry.

Then I met Adrie and Hans and during our conversation I learned that they happened to be the 'boys of eleven'! Because I'd never expected that - I could hardly believe it.

When I arrived home I immediately phoned Canada to tell the latest news.

And after that everything was accelerating...

Webmaster Andries Hoekstra of the website www.marketgarden.com I had approached before. We shared our information. Then I received a photo of Harold from his relatives; I sent it through to Andries in February 2004. He used these pictures during the TV broadcast of his new database. Later he told the reporters from the Dutch TV program "Netwerk" about my discovery of the two 'boys'. In August they gave me a call and asked me if I agreed in an interview. This happened August 11th and the editor thought this was an interesting subject. But they wanted one of the relatives in Canada to come to Holland. They also would like a relative of the Polish soldier to come; but I'd never searched for them yet.



Harold and Hilda Magnusson.

It was not easy to have the daughters of Harold's twin sister ready for traveling. They did not have a passport yet... Within a short time a lot of things had to be done. But it all went wonderfully well. I even succeeded in preparing a memorial service at Harold's grave.

On Sunday September 12th we picked up the sisters from Schiphol Airport to stay with us. They hardly could wait to be at home to show me all the things their Mum always kept in a box. Like decorations, photos, newspaper clippings etc. They told me so many things like: when the twins were born the doctor did not expect them to stay alive. But their mother nourished them with an eye-dropper and put them in a shoe box behind the stove to keep them warm. Unfortunately Harold only reached the age of 22...

The day after their arrival we were expected in Gorcum early for the TV recording. At first an interview inside was taken and after that in the cemetery. After



Images TV broadcast.



Local Newspaper Gorcum 15-09-2004 (Photo-Graffiti).

lunch we drove to Tienhoven for recordings in the church. Adrie and Hans were interviewed at the location they brought the bodies ashore.

When Adrie returned to the church the breaks of his electrical wheelchair failed. We could not prevent him from a collapse to the opposite stone stairs. Happily he survived! After this shocking event we drove to Gorcum for the remembrance service. On our way it started to rain. When the first drops fell we said to each other: the tears of Hilda!

The service was held in the pouring rain. The trumpet and the big pipe sounded beautifully, which was a miracle. Referend L. van Wingerden (my former class mate) ended his meditations, after that some wreaths were laid.

While I said my words of thanks the public address system stopped because it had become too wet. I explained that referred to the night on the Neder Rhine. At that time it also rained and the motor of the boat, in which Harold was, stopped in the middle of



the river. Because of the spark plugs got wet. They did not have a chance to escape and got a direct hit.

The scouts were involved to the commemoration because of a reason...

This picture of Magnusson's grave was taken in 1945 by Scouts man Van den Berg in Gorcum. Through the Red Cross he sent a letter to the parents. In which



he promised to bring flowers to the grave every year from now on. Together with his group of scouts. He contacted me after my appeal in the local newspaper. And he told me all about this. Sometimes later he received an answer from the relatives. Unfortunately he lost this letter.

Can you imagine my astonishment when the sisters brought this picture? Unfortunately: without

the covering letter. Together with his son the old Scouts man joined the commemoration and he was able to meet the sisters. The following day we were expected in Tienhoven once more. Now for the unveiling of the plaque by Magnusson's nieces.

But first I'll return to the plaque itself...

After Paul talked about organising "something" with the information from the soldiers. I suggested to have a remembrance plaque pinned at the church. And I approached the churchwarden Mr Blom. Which resulted in the request for the ANWB-plaque for the Historical Association by Mr Daniels. And with a little soft pushing they managed to deliver the information plaque just in time.

Adrie de Groot and Riet van Gelder sewed a beautiful Canadian flag, which covered the plaque. The Canadian sisters Alison and Mary Ellen unveiled it in presence of the Mayor of Zederik a. o. The local government also paid a part of the costs.



The visit of the sisters was planned during the 60th anniversary of Operation Market Garden. Therefore a lot of veterans had come to the region of Arnhem.

The question if I had found relatives of the Polish soldier came to my mind. Some time before I met Arno Baltussen of the Driel-Poland Association. That led me to ask him how I could try to find a comrade of Gajewnik. He suggested putting up a picture together with my appeal in the church in Driel. There would be a temporary exhibition during the 60th anniversary.



Salute at the grave. Heinz Daniels is recording the service. Beside him Hans Weeda under the umbrella.



Czeslaw Gajewnik.
His cousin Wanda at the grave in Oosterbeek.
Photo of the former situation.

Months later I got a phone call from a host in Doorwerth. She told me that her guest, Bolek Ostrowski, had recognised his comrade in the church. He had never seen him again since they were dropped near Driel from different planes. En nowadays he lives close to Toronto in ... Canada. This was unbelievable!

When I talked to him on the phone I first said to be happy he speaks English instead of Polish. He still reminds me of that. Last year he celebrated his 93rd birthday. He hopes to be in Driel in September. Bolek later traced a relative in Poland. Helena, the oldest sister of Czeslaw Gajewnik, was still alive and I could send her a picture of the grave. Through her daughter-in-law I received a photo of Helena. She held the photo of her brother's grave in her hand. By that time she already was in a bad condition and she died later.

In September 2006 her daughter-in-law Wanda stayed with me. She was the first relative who was able to visit the grave in Oosterbeek. Communication with her happened through a dictionary. Unfortunately

she missed Bolek's visit to Tienhoven. Not long ago I received a copy of a document about the reinterment of Gajewnik from Gorcum to the cemetery in Oosterbeek. On the 21th of August 1946 permission was given for this by the Mayor of Gorcum.

Wanda brought a pile of letters, which Czeslaw's parents received after his death. They were written in English and never read by them! I was the first to read them, very touching. They were written by a girlfriend in Scotland; this is where the Poles were trained to become a paratrooper. She writes that he did not return from the last mission and I waiting anxiously for a message from him.

She never received that. After the war she even tried to find his parents through the Red Cross. Because her address of 1944 was on the letters I could trace her through the Historical Association of Markinch. She was very surprised and told me that she was very happy to finally be able to close this chapter. I met her in 2007: Bunty, the girlfriend of Czeslaw! His relatives wanted me to return her love letters to her.



Poolse veteranen branden kaars bij gedenkbord

TIENHOVEN - Czeslaw Smyka en Bolek Ostrowski branden vorige week donderdagmiddag beiden een kaars bij het gedenkbord aan de hervormde kerk in Tienhoven. De Poolse oorlogsveteranen, die vochten tijdens de operatie Market Garden in en rond Arnhem, eerden daarmee één van hun kameraden: Czeslaw Gajewnik. Hij was één van de twee soldaten die bij Tienhoven gevonden werd in de rivier en waarvoor twee jaar geleden een herdenkingsplaat in de kerk werd aangebracht. De twee Polen, die beiden in Canada wonen, waren in Nederland voor de onthulling van een monument van de stichting Driel-Polen. foto Geurt Mouthaan



"Het Kontakt" 21-09-2006. Bolek Ostrowski on the right.

The local newspaper Glenrothes Gazette reported; photo G.G.

GEMEENTE TIENTHOVEN (Z.H.)										
Voeg toe	Verwijderen	Naam en woonplaats	Tusschen	Nr. van de lijklijst	Geboorte	Overleden	Overleden	Overleden	Overleden	Overleden

Document: Archief Het Nederlandse Rode Kruis.

Text document Dutch Red Cross archives:
 A.P.G.A. Jewnik, 1918 Czeslaw, RZ 361 KAT
 G. 53266 Spr. H.G. Ma Gnusson YNe. CND

Above mentioned persons were washed ashore at the Salmon Fishery “DE KOEKOEK” in the village TEINHOVEN (Z.H.). Their coffins were taken to the Protestant Church in Tienhoven (Z.H.) Later they were transported to Gorinchem, were they were to be buried.
 On the right side: Except for the above mentioned person no more allied soldiers are crashed, drifted ashore, recovered or found during the occupation of the village Tienhoven (Z.H.)
 The details you ask for I cannot give you. The inscriptions on their identity tags are totally copied and written. Further pieces of evidence of which proved their identity were not found.

Tienhoven (Z.H.), 4 October 1945.
 Deputy Mayor J. Brouwers

A.P.
 G. A. Jewnik
 1918
 CZESLAW
 R Z 361 KAT

66

G.53266
 SPR HG
 MA GNUSSON
 VNC. CND

Bovenstaande personen zijn op 13 November 1944 aangespoeld aan de de Koekoek onder de gemeente Tienhoven (ZH). Op 14 November 1944 zijn deze per lijklijst overgebracht naar de Ned. Herv. Kerk te Tienhoven (ZH). De begrafenis heeft plaatsgevonden op 16 November 1944 op de begraafplaats van de Herv. Kerk te Tienhoven (ZH). Hierna zijn zij met drie eveneens in de Lek gevonden Duitsers overgebracht naar Gorinchem. Dit heeft plaats gehad op 16 November 1944. Volgens mededeeling van J. van Straten Johz. worden zij daar begraven.

Document: Archief Zederik.

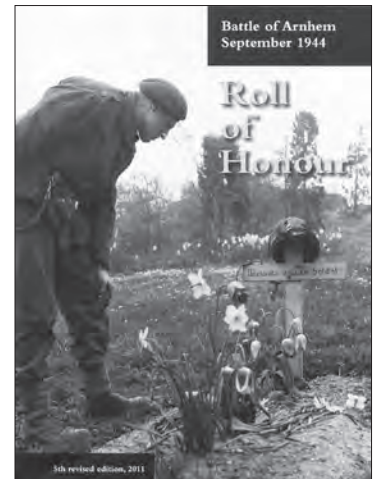
Text document Zederik Archives:
 Document Office for rehabilitation Gorinchem.
 Above mentioned persons were washed ashore on November 13th 1944 on “The Koekoek” in the community Tienhoven (Z.H.). November 14th their coffins were transported to the Protestant Church in Tienhoven (Z.H.).
 After that they were transported to Gorinchem together with three German soldiers, who were recovered from the Lek. This was on the 16th of November 1944.
 According to information from J. Van Straten Johz. they will be buried there.

This information turned up a very long time after the bodies were recovered.

Note:

The official Airborne Commemorations always take place around September 17th. This is the date that Operation Market Garden started. On the Saturday wreaths are laid at the Polish Monument in Driel. After this, the seven Canadian soldiers are commemorated at the Engineers Monument. This is located at the spot where the storm boats were unloaded from the trucks. To be carried across the dike and the water meadows before they could start the evacuation.

The revised publication of the ‘Roll of Honour’ is a magnificent book, which mentions all Allied victims of the Battle of Arnhem. (www.vriendenairbornemuseum.nl/rol of honour 2011.htm)



Cherry Prins (student) from Tienhoven wrote a nice article about Czeslaw Gajewnik (www.vijfeeuwenmigratie.nl/verhalen/he-didn-t-want-leave-his-team-shorthanded)