

HOLLAND - 40 YEARS LATER

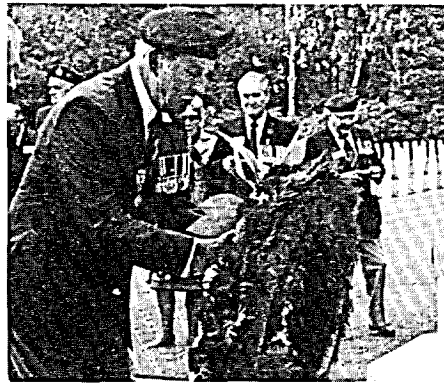
by Monty Kerr

Among the 4,000 Canadian veterans who returned to Holland to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the country's liberation in 1945 were former manager of the ITC mailroom, Lorne Prest, and two former trade commissioners, J.H. (Jim) Stone and the author.

For Jim Stone, whose wife Chris persuaded him to take the trip, it was like the final stages of the liberation in 1945 — a tremendous outpouring of welcome and gratitude to those veterans who had survived that campaign. It proved to be a memorable opportunity to meet people whom he hadn't seen for years. These included friends who traveled with him as he retraced the route he had followed as an artillery Lieutenant in the 17th Canadian Field Regiment during the Dutch campaign, in which he was awarded the Military Cross. The author, who served as a Pilot Officer Air Gunner in the R.C.A.F. attached to the RAF's 100 Lancaster bomber squadron also took part in the Dutch campaign, finishing his wartime flying missions in Europe with two missions dropping food near the Hague and Rotterdam from a bomber base in England. (Operation Manna was the official name for these two food dropping missions but bomber crews referred to them as Spam raids. Spam was a popular brand of canned meat.) He and Lorne Prest were two of the 17 veterans in the city of Ottawa delegation invited for the occasion under Ottawa's twinning arrangement with the Hague.

For Lorne Prest, visiting Holland was very special. He was a medical corporal with the Sherbrooke Fusiliers during the Dutch campaign. His wife, Claire, whom he had met during that campaign, is from Eindhoven and so the 1985 trip to Holland also allowed him to celebrate with his Dutch relations. Lorne joined the Governor General's Foot Guards in 1940 and served with them for most of the war. It may be difficult for Canadians to appreciate how the events of 40 years ago could be so vividly remembered; but, had Canada been occupied or five bitter years, then left battered and starving, I'm sure most of us would wish once more to see those who had long ago assisted in the liberation.

The ranks of Canada's World War II veterans are now sadly thinning and this perhaps, also had a bearing on the special observances which, like Topsy, "just grow'd". The gathering momentum almost swamped the resources of our Hague Embassy, but that is a story in itself of how our people at post mustered their reserves for one more big fling in the love affair between Canada and the Netherlands which has arisen from those events of 40 odd years ago.



Veterans Affairs Minister George Hees at the Canadian War Cemetery Bergen-Op-Zoom, Holland.

Ron Stansfield, now in Ottawa with the International Security and Arms Control Bureau, was at our Hague post at the time and therefore familiar with the story. As Ron explains, the Dutch government had, in 1980, coordinated the events marking the 35th anniversary of the country's liberation and it was to be the last of its kind. So, when villages and towns in Holland decided to do something special for the 40th anniversary, they were on their own. To fill the vacuum, Dutch groups, such as the "We Do Remember Committee", were formed to coordinate events that were spread throughout the country. These took place at town halls, war cemeteries, war memorials, arenas, special exhibitions and private homes. Individuals and groups in Holland also wrote to old friends in the forces of those nations that had taken an active role in Holland's liberation in 1945. The veterans turned up in the thousands from Canada, Britain, the U.S.A. and Poland. Some 4,000

were on hand from Canada alone, of which but a fraction were members of the official delegation led by Veterans Affairs Minister George Hees. He also was returning to familiar territory, for it was at the causeway to Walcheren Island in Holland's Schelde estuary that he was seriously wounded in 1944.

One of the major events took place at Apeldoorn May 6th when close to 150 000 turned up, some in wheel chairs, to welcome a major contingent of Canadian veterans assembled there for a memorial parade. The receptions included one at the residence of our Ambassador Lawrence Smith in the Hague, a city familiar to some of the veterans as the headquarters in Holland of the German occupying forces during World War II.

At the Canadian Embassy, everyone pitched in. For some it was a time of non-stop travel to make a speech, lay a wreath or just to answer a Dutch wish to pay special tribute to Canada. For others it was coordinating Canadian participation in events, preparing telexes in answer to Canadian enquiries or manning the chancery switchboard. Yes, a great deal went on behind the scenes, and like many other events in which our posts around the world participate, the public knew little of their contribution.

As one of the veterans of the wartime campaign in Holland who was fortunate enough to join in the 40th anniversary, I salute our chancery staff in the Hague for doing so much to make the occasion so memorable.

(Editor's note: Jim Stone served in the Trade Commissioner Service from 1948-1980. Lorne Prest retired in 1983 and Monty Kerr retired from the Grain Marketing Bureau in December 1985. He was in the Trade Commissioner Service from 1956-1964.)



Shown with Ottawa's former mayor, Marion Dewar, are members of the Ottawa Veterans delegation and a Dutchwoman who served in the Resistance. Monty Kerr is on the right.