

May reminds Dutch of Canadian connection

THE HAGUE

WHEN EUROPEAN governments crank up their royal families for state visits abroad, the explanation is usually economic. Whether sensible or not, the assumption is that royal visits are good for business.

That is certainly one of the reasons Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands will be in Canada next week. Not even the most devoted Dutch official tries to suggest that the Queen begged someone to arrange a seminar in Calgary on offshore drilling because she has a weakness for oil rigs. No, she will be there to sell Dutch technology.

The trade connections are impressive and surprising. The Netherlands is Canada's seventh-best trading customer, and the fourth-largest foreign investor in Canada.

But there is more to it than that. As a visitor you cannot escape it. Either you are reminded constantly of the Second World War, or people such as Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers, surprised and a bit defiant, are saying, "I think the Dutch are more positive about Canada than are the Canadians."

The connection is, above all, the war. Not

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In THE NETHERLANDS

unlike the Soviets, remembering the war is, for the Dutch, an essential element in any discussion of the country. But the Soviets build monuments and talk of how they defeated the Nazi oppressors; the Dutch talk simply of getting back their freedom.

In that terrible final Hungry Winter of 1944, thousands died of starvation. The lucky ones managed to find tulip bulbs to eat. It was from that hunger and the humiliation of occupation that, 54 years ago tomorrow, Canadian troops liberated The Netherlands.

That's not the only war link between the two countries. With its homeland occupied, the Dutch royal family spent most of the war

years in Ottawa. The tens of thousands of tulips that bloom in Ottawa every spring are a gift in remembrance of that shelter.

And then, of course, came the postwar tide of immigrants — there are now an estimated 500,000 Canadians of Dutch descent.

With history and commerce and sentiment so intertwined, the temptation is to consider the two countries very much alike. In fact, they are startlingly different. Obviously, size sets the two apart. The Netherlands, with 14 million people, is one of Europe's smaller — and one of the world's more densely populated — states. Canada is 320 times larger, with fewer than twice as many people.

In contrast to Canada, which still echoes with painful debates about identity and destiny, the Dutch are who they have been for centuries. There has never been any doubt about it. With some satisfaction, Mr. Lubbers quotes Charles de Gaulle to the effect that there are really only two nations in Europe, the French and the Dutch.

The Dutch have always been able to reinforce their cultural identity because their language is unique. Conversations about the peril of Canada's cultural existence are met by uncomprehending curiosity. At least your

language isn't threatened by the Americans, one man said.

History and geography have inspired quite different patterns of trade. The Dutch have long been traders, and barriers anywhere impeded the commerce by which they survived and prospered.

Whenever they talk of free trade, whether between Canada and the United States or within Europe, it is in terms of opportunity, not threat. There is not the tradition of John A. Macdonald and the National Policy.

Yet, with all that, to be here is to feel remarkably at home. It is not exclusively to do with the war, but that is a strong factor. In two quite different countries, the war is a painful shared experience, remembered especially in the month of May.

This is a flat land, but outside the town of Groesbeek is a beautiful hill that looks down toward the Reichswald Forest and Germany, three miles away. On the top of the hill is a Canadian cemetery with 2,600 white markers that recall the devastation of a generation of young people on their first trip to Europe.

The memorial reads: *Pro amicis mortui amicis vivimus*. We live in the hearts of friends for whom we died.