

# *THE WILLOW*



*THE TREE THAT SAW EVERYTHING*

*Special concept version from the story of the Weeping willow for  
Ina and Allan, daughter and son of Jan Harm Dijkstra,  
the man who planted the willow on the Island,*



*Offereed by Koos Nieuwenhuizen member of the board of the  
Local history Society Sprang Capelle during the visit of Cheryl  
and Allan to Kapelsche Veer on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2017.*



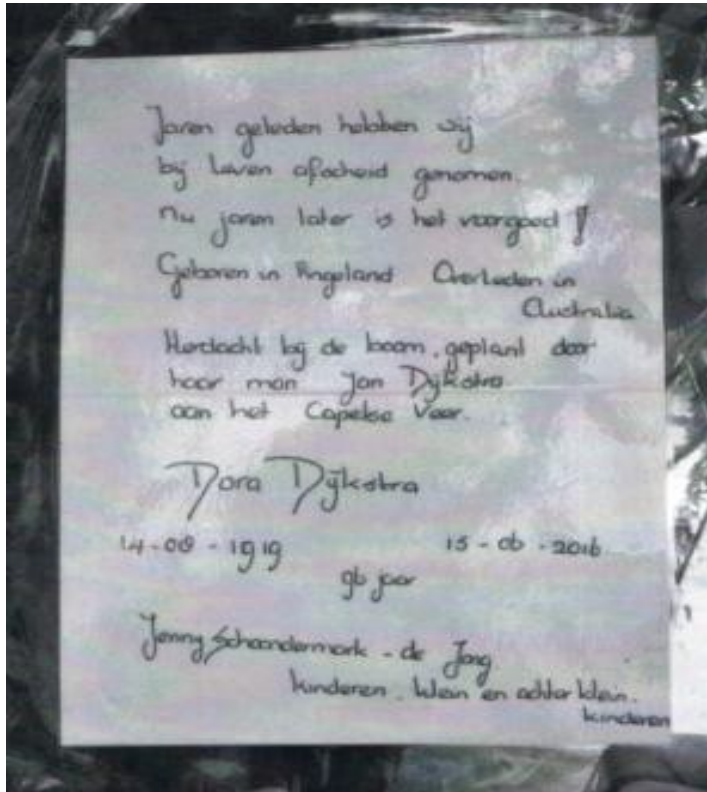
# THE MONUMENT AT THE CAPELSE VEER

## THE BEACON MASTER, THE AIRCRAFT MAKER AND THE WEeping WILLOW

By Koos Nieuwenhuizen & Anton van der Galien.

### 1. How does it start?

On June 15, 2016, the daughter-in-law of lighthouse keeper Lambertus Dijkstra passes away in Australia. In the summer of that same year, an A4 sheet flutters in the wind on the weeping willow near the monument between the Oude and the Bergsche Maas in Sprang-Capelle.



David, Jenny and Ina

In July 2016, Ina Farrer-Dijkstra and her husband David come from Australia to Holland. They visit the willow and the monument with Jenny and are photographed by the willow, from which a large branch was only broken off by the storm on Easter Monday. Ina tells us the story of her father and grandfather, the aircraft maker and the lighthouse keeper.

We want to show you the origin, the cause, the history, and the present of the weeping willow and the monument at the ferry over the Bergsche Maas at Sprang-Capelle. The basis of the history is the interview we had in July 2016 with Ina Farrer-Dijkstra.

Dijkstra is written as Dykstra in Australia.

The life of Jan Dijkstra, Ina's father and the planter of the willow, serves as our guide. In, where possible, a chronological order will be addressed:

The reason for the story.

Lambertus, Ina's grandfather, and life in the house on the dike.

Jan as a conscripted soldier serving in England during the war.

The naming of the ferry and its surroundings.

The OD and the group André.

The battles for the bridgehead.

The family of Jan that ends up in Australia via England and the Netherlands.

The ferry service Capelle - Dussen.

The story of the willow and the monument.

The discoveries in the area after the war.

And a closing word.

## 2. Grandfather Lambertus Dijkstra.



Lambertus Dijkstra, Ina's & Allan's grandfather, is born on April 10, 1888, in Vledder, as the son of Lambertus Dijkstra and Aaltje v Roijen, both from Vledder, Drenthe. He marries Gooitske/Groitske Veenstra on October 8, 1909, in Smilde, who was born on June 27, 1880, in Ooststellingwerf, as the daughter of Marten Jans Veenstra and Janna Gooitzens Woudstra, both from Ooststellingwerf, Friesland. They live in Smilde until February 15, 1914, and then the family moves to Vreeswijk in Utrecht, where Lambertus subsequently becomes a city council member.

### They have six children:

**Lamberdina** is born on May 1, 1910, in Smilde, and dies in October 1979 in Sprang-Capelle at the age of 69.

**Marten**, born on August 14, 1912, in Smilde. He is the one who also lived in the house on the dike by the Capelse ferry. He dies in August 1959 at the age of 46.

**Janna**, born on January 8, 1914, in Smilde, dies at the age of 8 in January 1922 in Vreeswijk. **Stefana Jacoba** is born on March 22, 1917, in Vreeswijk and dies in February 1922 at the age of only four. **Jan Harm**, usually called Jan, was born on January 15, 1919, in Vreeswijk; he is the father of Ina and dies on October 17, 2000, in Camden, Australia, at the age of 81. **Harm Herman** also does not live long; he was born on April 1, 1920, and died on May 21, 1922, at just two years old. **Marinus**, the youngest, was born on August 15, 1921, in Vreeswijk. He plants the willow on the dike along the Bergsche Maas together with Jan in 1934.



Lambertus en Gooitske gaan per motorfiets op vakantie









**Exhibited chicken**



**An exhibition at grandpa's place on the dike attracts a lot of attention.**

Father Jan Dijkstra is five years old when the family moves to Sprang-Capelle and lives as a child in the house on the dike, near the river Maas. He is only 11 when his mother Gooitske passes away. Grandpa Lambertus's house looks like a farm; there are mostly chickens, but also horses and a goat that pulls a cart. Grandpa keeps pigeons and wins prizes by participating in exhibitions with his chickens and rabbits.

**Grandma Martha and Grandpa Lambertus with a prize winner**



**Grandma with the prizes**



### 3. Father Jan Dijkstra

Pa Jan tells us children stories about his youth. How they kept all the animals on the "farm" at the Capelse ferry, pigeons, chickens, horses, a goat, and St. Bernard dogs. How he goes swimming in the river Maas. He also sails a lot.



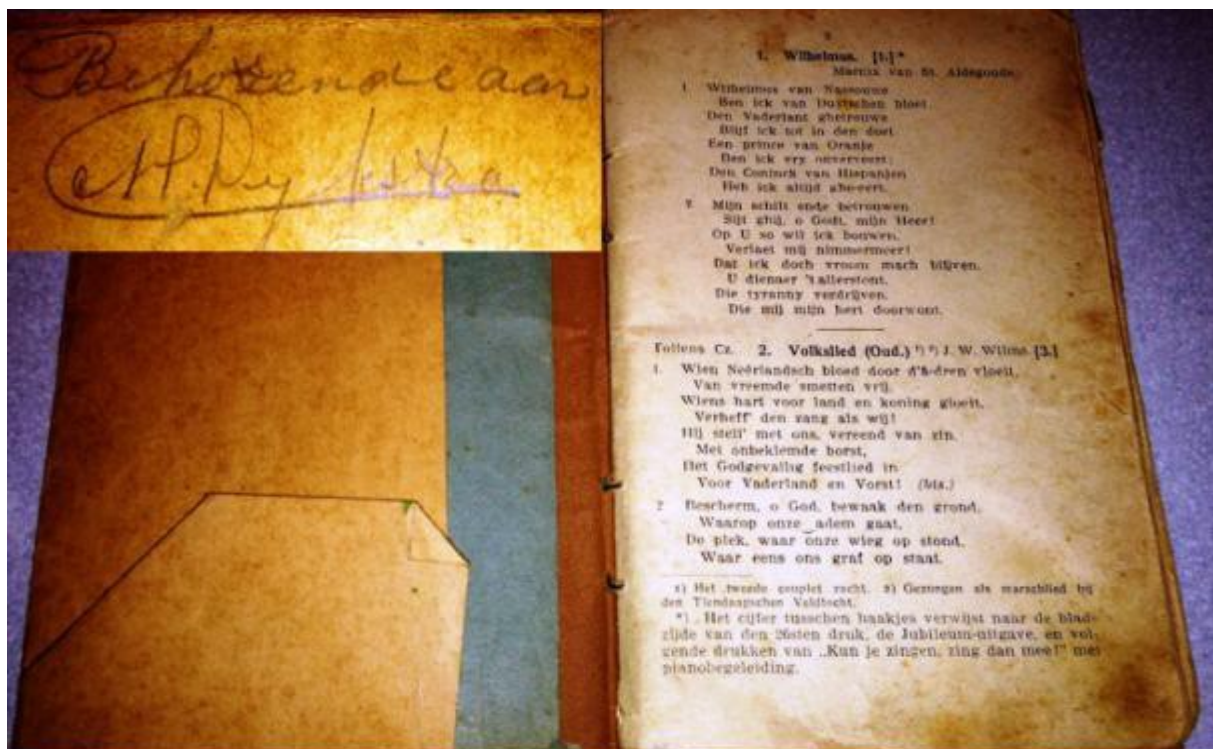
Martha, Lamberdien, Jan and Marinus



Marinus, Jan and 2 nephews Veenstra

From the polders, the children visit Dijkstra at the Public School in Capelle.

The following songbook from that time belonged to Uncle Marinus. It was donated by Wietze Dijkstra to our local history association. On the first page are the two national anthems that have competed for the first and official place in our country, namely "Wien Neerlands bloed" and the "Wilhelmus."



In 1934, at the age of 15, father Jan plants the willow together with his brother Marinus, who is then 13 years old. Ina doesn't know what the willows were planted for. He doesn't say anything about it. It is indeed a big thing in his life that he and Marinus planted the willow. Especially because of the consequences. The willow was part of a ring of windbreak trees and shrubs around the house. As the only remaining tree, the willow still stands there. Under that weeping willow, the monument was later erected in memory of the bloody battle at the Capelle ferry that was fought between the Allies and the Germans at the end of the war.

### **Marinus and Jan on the buck cart with air tyres**



Jan goes to technical school and his education is in the electrical and mechanical fields. He gets a job as a mechanic and according to Ina, the owner of the company was van Beek. This is the company on Raadhuisstraat 138



Raadhuisstraat that was taken over by Marinus van Beek from Jan van Wijlen. Son Bertus (Bep) van Beek, now residing in Zeist, tells Koos: Yes, Jan worked for my father before the war. From around 1937 until he was called up by the military. Marinus van Beek and three other employees were also mobilized. From blacksmith shop, inn, bicycle shop, car garage, to Machine and Transport Screw Factory Van Beek B.V. In 1958, Bep took over Marinus's company. Even after he returned from England with his wife and child,

he continued to work at Van Beek for a while. Jan was collegial, meticulous, and he also had a strong sense of duty. The first car, a Skoda, that the Van Beek company sold after the war was to Dr. Drukker; Jan made it roadworthy.

Then, after the visit to a client, the company car broke down a few kilometers before he got home, he didn't leave it behind. Jan pushed the vehicle back to the office.

Grandpa Lambertus and his wife Martha move to Heusden on October 19, 1938. Lambertus is then the National Lighthouse Keeper.

Ina indicates that her father Jan has been keeping a "events" book since 1939 throughout his entire adult life, probably starting when he was in service.

Marten Dijkstra, the older brother of Jan and Marinus, works for the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management in Arnhem.

He marries Aria Verwoerd from Almkerk on November 4, 1938, in Almkerk and Uitwijk

According to the personal card from the municipal archive of Waalwijk, Marten Dijkstra lived in the tollkeeper's house with house number C270 from April 14, 1925, to June 23, 1941.





View of the Bergsche Maas from the house on the dike

Jan Harm Dykstra BORN 15-1-1919  
 about 18-YEARS (1937)  
 HOLLAND AAN DE DIK.  
 CAPELLE AAN DE MAAS  
 NOW Married to DORA since 4-4-1943  
 AT THORNHAM



Jan Dykstra  
 1938  
 CAPELSCHE VEER.  
 3 of our horses.  
 The house is just off  
 the picture to the  
 top-left.

#### 4. Jan is conscripted and evacuated to England (1939-1946). (moved with mum, lina to Holland 1947)



***Emblem of the aircraft manufacturer on Jan's right sleeve***

According to the service record of Jan Harm Dijkstra, registration number 19.01.15.501, from the Ministry of Defence, he was enlisted on February 1, 1939, as GD (Regular Conscription) in the 3rd Aviation Regiment of the Royal Netherlands Army. It is also noted that he arrived in England on May 30, 1940, and was promoted to corporal on November 1, 1942.

The further details about Jan's service time during the war in England come, among other sources, from books about personnel and operations of 320 Squadron.

He starts as a conscript soldier aircraft mechanic in the ground service personnel of the army and is later assigned to the "aviation department" of the Royal Navy, the Naval Aviation Service, abbreviated as MLD.

Aircraft technician is a general term in the Royal Netherlands Navy. Two examples of aircraft maintenance personnel are parachute packer and upholsterer. Due to his

technical education, Jan has worked as an aircraft mechanic specializing in engine technology.

The MLD was founded in 1917. Budget cuts lead to neglect, resulting in insufficient and outdated equipment. Until, due to the German threat in Europe, a turning point occurs in 1937: The MLD is given a wartime task and new Fokker T.VIIIw aircraft are ordered.

In the early days of the war, the superiority of the German attacker is very great. At the suggestion of the Commander of the MLD, the Chief of Naval Staff, already in the afternoon of May 13th, requests permission from General H.G. Winkelman, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, to allocate the MLD's equipment and personnel for the fight abroad.

That very evening, the order comes to evacuate all single-engine aircraft and as much personnel as possible to France. A pilot officer who reports in France and says that the MLD's aircraft belong in a museum is told by his French colleague:

We have taken aircraft out of the museum, it is war. Activating a Dutch squadron in France fails due to technical problems and the inexperience of the personnel. It is not known from whom, but on May 22, 1940, the order comes to divert as soon as possible to Calshot, a Royal Air Force (RAF) seaplane base near Southampton. The different types of aircraft are assigned various destinations in England and the Dutch East Indies. On May 29, it was decided that a fleet of eight seaplanes would be stationed at RAF Pembroke Dock. Together with 2 added flying boats, this marks the beginning of a Dutch Squadron at the RAF.



***Jan as a conscript in uniform on the dike in January 1940***



***FOKKER T.V111-w***



On June 2, the 8 Fokker T.VIIIw's arrive in Pembroke, marking the beginning of 5 years of continuous struggle for the first Dutch Squadron in World War II.

Jan is also evacuated via France and placed in Pembroke Dock in Wales on July 29, 1940. On August 1, 1940, he is officially detached to the MLD (Royal Netherlands Navy) as an aircraft mechanic for the duration of the war.



**A Dutch aircraft, a Fokker T.VIIIw from 320 Squadron, is being transported to the water by a Dutch crew at Pembroke Dock.**

*After the names 1st Escadrille and Dutch Squadron were used, on August 2nd, the official announcement from the English Air Ministry stated that the squadron would be named No 320 (RDNAS) Squadron. RDNAS stands for Royal Dutch Naval Air Service Wing. A 321 Squadron is also being formed.*

*Ina says that her father served in 320 Squadron. When forming the squadrons, the lack of technical ground personnel is a major problem. Jan, along with 45 fellow army personnel, in addition to KLM staff and fleet personnel, will be important in making 320 Squadron operational. Pembroke is a dreary and desolate town with a few pubs and a cinema, and it has little to offer the "jannes." The corporals and privates are accommodated in tents. The meal provision by the RAF is little varied and predominantly low in fat, and for the Dutch stomachs, double rations must soon be provided. The allowances will no longer be fully paid out starting from the end of August 1940.*

*Besides the lack of personnel, the standardisation on English aircraft equipment, the constant shortage of spare parts, and the limited tooling at Pembroke Dock, the lack of knowledge of the English language is also a problem. All necessary modifications to the aircraft are successfully carried out by the aircraft manufacturers with a lot of improvisation and during long working hours. The entire Technical Service can then look back with pride on this outstanding achievement after the completion of these modification works.*

*Already on June 20, 320 Sq can independently participate in operational missions such as convoy protection. On July 26, fate strikes, the first blow. The R10 of aircraft commander Martaré does not return to base. The wreckage is found at sea, later the remains of two crew members are picked up by a fishing vessel, the other two must be reported as missing. The cause of the crash is unknown.*



Jan marries on April 4, 1943, at The All Saints Church in Thornham, with Dora Howling Smith, who was born on August 14, 1919, in Fakenham, Norfolk, England, as the daughter of Albert Smith and Elizabeth Hannah Williamson. The photo next to this text was taken on their wedding day.



*All Saints Church Thornham*

#### ***Dora and Jan on there Wedding day***

Ina tells that after their wedding, mother will move in with an uncle and aunt in Norwich. When daughter Lena is born, Dora rents a house in Holme, which is located near Thornham. Jan is at the base with 320 Squadron and only comes home when he has leave. They live in Holme until they move to Heusden in 1947. Nowadays, Thornham in Norfolk is a small village with only 400 inhabitants, west of Sheffield and north of Cambridge on the English west coast. Thornham Church dates back to before 1348 and belongs to the Anglican Church. One of the church's bells was donated in 1969 by the crew of the minesweeper HMS Thornham and is rung only once a year. That happens every November 11th at 11 o'clock to announce two minutes of silence. On that day, the English commemorate the signing of the treaty at the end of the First World War on the "Armistice Day" of the First World War on November 11, 1918, at 11:00 AM with two minutes of silence and call this day "Armistice Day."

On the Sunday closest to November 11th, the English commemorate the fallen of all wars with large-scale ceremonies at war memorials. In London, the national commemoration is held in the presence of the British royal family, featuring an impressive parade in which a veteran detachment from the Dutch Armed Forces also participates each year. This day is called Remembrance Day and unofficially Poppy Day.

The first child of Dora and Jan, Lena Elizabeth, is born during the war in Norwich, Norfolk, England on March 28, 1944.

Just like his father Lambertus, Jan is also an avid motorcyclist. On the right, Jan in 1944 in England with a newly purchased Lee Enfield "motorbike."



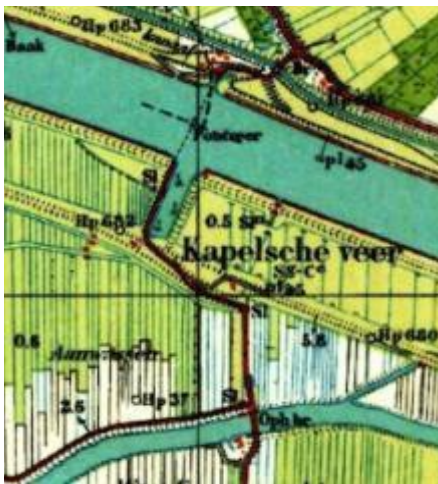


## 5.What's in a Name?



On the left, the situation in 1895. On the map, the ferry over the Oude Maasje is listed as Capelsche Veer with the addition Pontveer. The Bergsche Maas, colloquially known as the new Maas, has not yet been dug.

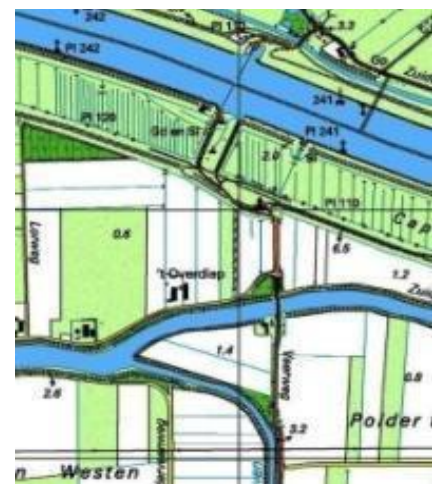
When the Bergsche Maas was dug in 1904, only the ferry was designated as Capelsch Kabelpontveer. Then the tollkeeper's house and the double ferry house are already marked with red squares, and a telephone line has already been laid from the western direction. The municipal boundary of Sprang-Capelle runs in the Bergsche Maas, and the area between the summer dike and the dug river is referred to as Capelsche Uiterwaard. Over the Old Maas River, there is a drawbridge.



1936



1958



1998

On the 1936 map, before the start of the war, the area south of the Bergsche Maas and east of the Veerweg was named Kapelsche veer and the ferry was indicated as Pontveer. The polder west of the Veerweg is referred to as Aanwassen.

On the topographic map of 1958, a permanent (Bailey) bridge spans the Oude Maasje, and the area is designated as Kapelseveer.

On the last shown map from 1998, neither the ferry nor the area have a name. The monument has now been made visible and the area to the west is designated as 't Overdiep, a name that has since disappeared from current maps.

## 6. The OD (Order Service) and the André Group.



After the Dutch capitulation on May 15, 1940, the soldiers are declared prisoners of war by the Germans. But as early as June, they are sent home as a gesture of goodwill. From a number of military associations, which were still tolerated by the Germans at the time, the initial objective was to literally establish a police force to maintain public order. They expect that the Germans will leave after a year. However, if it turns out that liberation is still far away, many members will engage in resistance work in the form of espionage, sabotage, theft of weapons, ammunition, and explosives, and armed resistance.

An important, illegal, underground Order Service (OD) emerges. In the initial period, the OD is hit by arrests and death sentences. In 1942, first 71 OD members were shot dead by the Germans, and later another 24.



Another setback for the OD is that in May 1942, 2000 professional officers are still taken prisoner. Nevertheless, the service manages to recover. This new, better-secured OD comes under the leadership of Captain Pieter Jacob Six, who is committed to consolidating the resistance efforts in the Netherlands.

On September 5, 1944, the BS, Binnenlandse Strijdkrachten, was established as a coalition of the previously uncooperative original resistance groups. The OD will join forces with the LKP (Landelijke Knokploegen) and the RVV (Raad Van Verzet) to become part of the BS.

Although the entire resistance in 1944/45 was estimated to have no more than 45,000 participants, in 1945 there were 150,000 to 200,000 BS members in the Netherlands.

The Sprang-Capellenaar Jos van Wijlen, at the request of the commander of Fort Altena in Sleeuwijk, goes in search of the positions of German attacking units in the vicinity of Dongen as early as May 13, 1940. This espionage, as an individual action, is the first act of resistance by Jos van Wijlen. He becomes increasingly involved in the underground activities. Theft of weapons, looting an NSB car with propaganda materials, and later the bigger work; helping Jewish refugees.

Mayor Smit and Jos van Wijlen form the core of an ever-growing resistance group that is named André. From 1943, the André group became part of the organisations LKP and LO (National Organisation for Assistance to Escaped Prisoners).

When Sprang-Capelle is liberated by the British on October 30, 1944, André's group joins the Order Service, and when this is disbanded, they join the BS, with Jos also becoming the deputy district commander.

**NED. BINNENLANDSCHE STRIJDKRACHTEN**  
Interior military forces of the Netherlands

Bij dezen wordt verklaard dat  
This is to certify that

Naam  
Surname **RIJKEN**

Voornaam  
Christian name **Adriaan**

Persoonsbewijs  
Identity-card No. **W 2/00 8992**

Adres  
Address **Waalwijk Stationsstraat 123**

Behoort tot  
Belongs to **Orde-Dienst**

Onderdeel  
Army-unit **Plaatselijk Commando Sprang-Capelle**

Functie - Rang  
Function - Grade **Gewest 17**

De Gewestelijke Cdt. v. d. Ordedienst (O.D.)  
The Regional Commander „Ordedienst“ (O.D.)

Op last  
By order **PLAATSELIJK COMMANDANT**

Datum van origine  
Date of issue **3 November 1944**

**SPRANG-CAPELLE**

**Statement of OD member Ad Rijken November 1944**





**Spitfire with Polish pilot lands on November 6, 1944, in the Dullaert and is guarded by OD member Jos Rosenbrand.**



**Jos van Wijlen as Captain André of the BS**

Jos van Wijlen is appointed as a captain in the BS in December. After Jos helped Jews and pilots during the war, Captain André started working as a "crossingsmaster" at the request of the Allies from December 1, 1944. They work together with the Albrecht group. 21 Linecrossers sail at least 380 times with boats through the Biesbosch between liberated and occupied territory. They transport people, weapons, transmitters, messages, and microfilms. Sabotage is also a task, and the André group does not shy away from it; the Winterdijk is broken open, the railway line through the Langstraat is blown up, as well as ships in Waspik. In February 1945, the district of the BS was dissolved, and Canadian units and the Military Authority took over the security duties. On October 26, 1983, Prince Bernard in Zidewinde awarded the Resistance Memorial Cross to 29 individuals from the André and Albrecht groups. Jos van Wijlen as Captain André of the BS Spitfire with Polish pilot lands on November 6, 1944, in the Dullaert and is guarded by OD member Jos Rosenbrand.

**Awards of Jos: BS insignia, British Royal Medal, US Medal of Freedom, Bronze Lion, Resistance Memorial Cross, Queen Wilhelmina Jubilee Medal**



## 7.Fighting at the Capelle ferry 44/45.



**Aerial photo RAF December 28, 1944**

During the evacuation of North Brabant, the German LXXXVIII Army Corps makes use of the ferry at Capelle. On November 8, 1944, all German units were located north of the Bergsche Maas, the bridge over the Oude Maasje was partially destroyed, and the ferry was sunk. In the night of November 8 to 9, German patrols are already active again in the area between the Oude Maas and the Bergsche Maas. The Allies fail to permanently occupy the "island." Taking advantage of this ideal situation, the Germans then position a small permanent occupation force on the island. When General Kurt Student, commander of Army Group H, is informed on December 8 about the impending Ardennes Offensive, the "island" is given "bridgehead status."

After Marten Dijkstra leaves the tollkeeper's house, according to the personal card of the municipality of Waalwijk, Hendrik Adriaan van der Zanden lives in the tollkeeper's house from April 20, 1943, to May 25, 1945. Drik is born in 1910 in Oosterhout and marries Adriana Huijgens from Made. He works his entire life at the Directorate-General for Public Works and Water Management and is transferred from Teteringen, where he was a bridge keeper, to Sprang-Capelle in 1939. His task is to record the water levels, check the fairway, and verify the draft and cargo of the

ships. Occasionally, he also fills in as a ferry operator. At the beginning of December '44, Adriana and Drik have three children: Wim, Annie, and the only 11-month-old Govertje, who has pneumonia.

They live in the no man's land between the warring parties. Goof recounts that when there is shelling on December 10, 1944, the shells fall so close to the house that a fire breaks



**Drik en Adriana**



**Fam v.d.Zanden, back: Ad, Wim, Antoon, and Goof. For: Ria, Mother, Jeanne, Father, Henk, and Annie**

whereupon father and mother flee the house with the small children and take shelter by the willow tree. The family departs for Made where Govertje dies two days later. Later, they return to Sprang-Capelle where they move into an emergency shelter. There, on December 29, the twins Antoon and Goof are born. Afterwards, they move to Raadhuisstraat in Sprang where the children Ria, Henk, Ad, and Jeanne are born.





***An emergency housing unit like the one the V.d.Zanden family has lived in.***

using it to tie down the Allied troops and to give his paratroopers active front-line experience. There are differing views at various command levels among the Germans and the Allies regarding the usefulness of their actions concerning "Kapelsche veer." Nevertheless, from late December 1944 to January 31, 1945, a fierce but, as it later turns out, completely unnecessary battle takes place over the "island." That battle actually begins on December 30 with a pair of reconnaissance patrols by the Poles, one of which is described hereafter.

Mrs. A.C. de Laat van Ommeren worked at the municipal secretary's office of Sprang-Capelle during the war years. She keeps a personal diary from September 3, 1944, to May 28, 1945. On Saturday, December 30, 1944, the following is written:

Nineteen boys from the order service with six Poles went on patrol to the Maas at night. A dozen boys carried a boat on their shoulders to cross the (Old) Maas. During this journey to the Maas through the polders north of Capelle, one of the carriers stepped on a landmine. Five Poles were injured and nine boys from the OD:

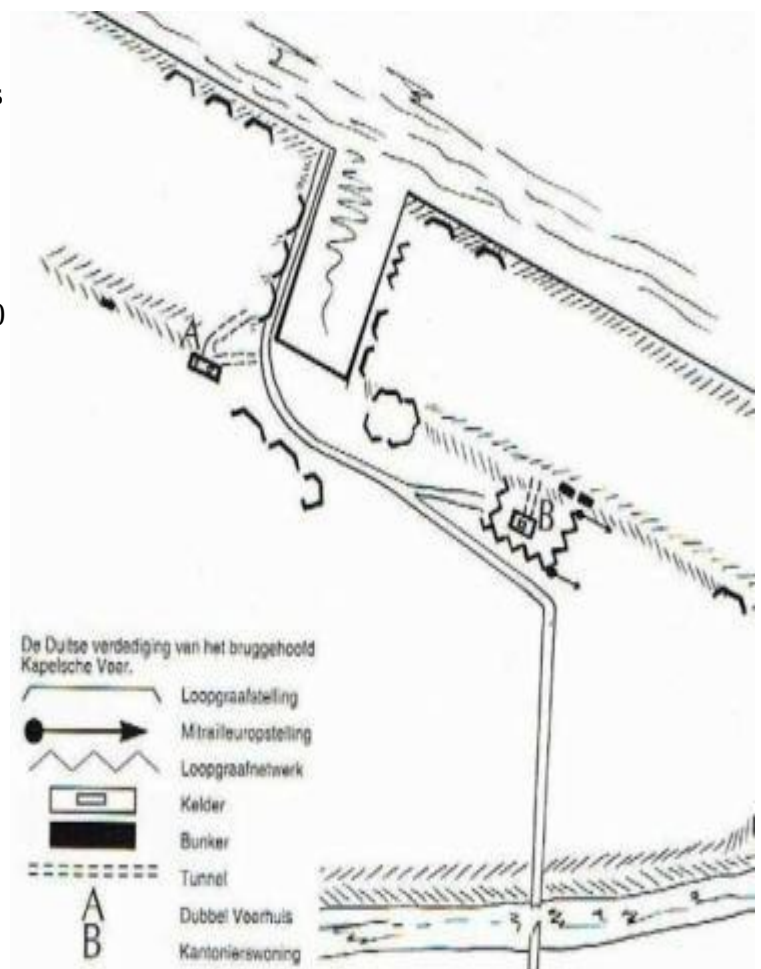
J.Smit, Chr.J.v.Dongen, J.W.v.Schuppen, W.J.Ophorst, H.J.Bosman, H.J.v.Engelen, M.G.Vos, J.H.Kuysten, J.v.d.Hoek (40). All were taken to 4

hospitals respectively in Ghent, Turnhout, and Ostend. A few V-1s came over. Two Poles, Ludwig Kaper and Gerhard, visiting. Night Shooting heavily at night. At our place (Julianalaan 82), the skylight is broken and about 40 roof tiles are damaged.

In 1956, they move to Breda where Drik is appointed as a road inspector. Years after the war, Goof returns with his father to the place where their house once stood, and there, standing by the willow tree, Drik tells his son about the intense events that took place there in December 1944. Drik van der Zanden passed away in the year 1999 in Teteringen. The cantonnier's house and the double ferry house are part of the fighting.

Around both houses, the Germans are digging trenches and the various defensive positions are being connected by tunnels.

At the end of December, it becomes clear that "Kapelsche Veer" no longer serves as a bridgehead for a supporting attack in favour of the Ardennes Offensive. Nevertheless, Student wants to continue



A summary of the story by Jochem van Schuppen about the same patrol.

When Henk van Engelen and I report to the town hall on the Capelse dike after courier duty on Friday, December 29, 1944, Leen Kuisten tells us that he still needs a few people for a patrol with the Poles that evening. Henk and I both volunteer. That evening, we go with a total of 19 people from the town hall to the headquarters of the Poles in the villa on Nieuwevaart. At half-past eight, we leave with a group of Poles for the Capelse harbour, where we have to wait and are let in at the Schapendonk family opposite Snee's factory. Around half past ten, we are called and in front of Snee, there are two canvas boats that we have to carry on our shoulders. Opposite the Capelse church, we walk into the polder. I walk at the front right of the first boat



with a Pole behind me. Ten meters ahead of us, the Polish commander and our commander Chris van Dongen are walking together with a supply group and even more heavily armed Poles. To stay out of the line of fire, we walk next to the road over ploughed farmland. We have already advanced quite a bit when an artillery bombardment erupts on the German positions. Arrived at a Polish mortar position, we take a break.

Meanwhile, it becomes foggy and after a quarter of an hour we continue, and as we approach the Suijlekom farm, we are ordered to keep as quiet as possible, which is not easy in the farmland because someone often slips. The last stretch, therefore, we go over the road.

Suddenly, a terrible bang, I am thrown off and end up in the right ditch. I don't feel any pain, but I do notice that I've been hit on my head. I reach for it and feel blood, and a large bump forms. At first, I think of being hit by an artillery shell. I want to get up, but I can't, and when I try to pull myself up with my

***The canvas boat that needs to be carried.***

hands, I burn my fingers on a piece of a landmine that is buried there, as it later turned out.

Meanwhile, I feel that my left knee and right leg are also affected. I don't feel any pain yet, but that comes when Willem Braspenning tries to help me up, which fails.

The Germans can hear the moans and screams of the wounded, and despite the fog, we come under machine gun fire. A Pole from the mortar group bandages my left knee and then takes up position again. Meanwhile, they begin to transport the wounded to Capelle.

Due to the severe pain, I have to wait for a stretcher in the freezing cold. Joop, seeing that I'm cold, covers me with his own coat. Only Henk van Engelen and Jan Smit are still lying there injured. Joop Ruis was the only one not injured to be placed behind the Bren. Only after two hours do Polish Red Cross soldiers arrive with stretchers. With ups and downs and constantly under fire from the German machine gun, we finally reach the harbour quay. There, we are loaded into the ambulance with three men and taken to Loon op Zand. In a school, I receive new bandages and some injections. After this first treatment, we are transported by ambulance to a school in Goirle, where Maurits and the Pole who was behind me carrying the boat are also lying. I am in a lot of pain and ask for a sedative injection. When I get it, I won't know anything about the world anymore. In the meantime.



They operate on me and then I wake up with casts on both legs. On my right leg, there's a hinged case. I see that the Pole's bed is empty. He didn't make it, he had a shard in his trachea and choked. After a week of joy, unconsciousness, being deemed unfit for transport, an unnoticed visit from my father, and the announcement that the left leg does not need to be amputated but will remain stiff, I am taken by ambulance to Turnhout. We are back in a school building, Maurits Vos and Jan Smits are also there. There, for the first time, I can move and get up again, my back hurts in the process, and when a nurse looks at it at my request, she discovers that there is still a shard inside. A doctor is called in, and I am immediately operated on under local anaesthesia. Although fourteen days had already passed, they had not noticed that injury.

While I am in Turnhout, my father, Mayor Smit (unfortunately, son Jan Smit had already left), and Harrie Peters come to visit. I am told that I will be moved by train. This time to Bruges and again in a school. It's overcrowded there, we end up lying in the hallway, where it's cold and draughty, and I haven't slept all night because every few hours they twist the handle of my right foot to stretch it.

Fortunately, we leave for Donk the next morning, a village near Bruges, where we end up in a sanatorium set up as a military hospital. I meet a Canadian soldier there who, slightly injured, is acting as an interpreter, and to my surprise, I know him. It is Tony Devreker who was billeted opposite us at Schiedon in Sprang-Capelle at that time.

At the end of January 1945, there are only a few of us left in the ward. The healing process for Gerrit Bossers from Keizersveer and me will take a long time, so it is decided to transfer the two of us to England. Via Zeebrugge, we fly with a Dakota with a Canadian crew to an airport near Swindon in South

England. From there, we take a special train to London. At a station, we are lying in the middle of the platform. Chilled to the bone, surrounded by busy people and the regular sound of flying bombs hitting, a sound I knew all too well from home. I felt anxious and abandoned. At that moment, a Salvation Army soldier came up to me. It is a young girl, she gives me warm food and drink and a cigarette. She talks a bit about unimportant things and stays with me until the train departs. I will never forget this benefactor.

BRAB. DAGBLAD 22 OKT. 1994

## Draaginsigne voor Van Schuppen



Van een verslaggever

SPRANG-CAPELLE – J. van Schuppen (68) uit Sprang-Capelle heeft gistermiddag uit handen van burgemeester E. Ockels de Draaginsigne Gewonden ontvangen. Dat gebeurde in het gemeentehuis van Sprang-Capelle.

● *Burgemeester Ockels speldt J. van Schuppen het insigne op terwijl mevrouw Van Schuppen toekijkt.*

*Foto Martin de Goede*

*Poolse troepen door de polder ten noorden van de Winterdijk*

After a train journey of several hours, we arrive in Leicester and are taken to the Royal Infirmary Hospital. Shortly after Easter, I am transferred to a convalescent home for Dutch soldiers near Walsall, Staffordshire. There lies Gerrit Bossers as well.

In May, I am declared cured and join the Dutch training camp in Wolverhampton. At the end of May, I receive the order to go on leave to Holland. After a chaotic journey via Hendon Airport, we land in Eindhoven, fly further to Gilze Rijen where we disembark. Checking out in Breda and taking a taxi, arranged through an uncle and the Red Cross, I am finally back home. Surprise, because no one knows about my return home. This is the end of quite a remarkable journey.



***Situation sketch Kapelsche Veer***

place here between us and our opponents: Poles, Canadians, and English. It was very hard, and I don't like to think back on it. Everything was equally horrific, from the battles to our stay in the trenches, which were surrounded by corpses. There was nothing human left. Nothing.

We were there from December '44 to January '45. It was very cold, there was snow. Our people stayed in the trenches for four to five weeks. They couldn't wash themselves. And shaving not at all. Food came only irregularly. It was a terrible torment. The entire ground had been churned up by grenades. In between were the foxholes and the dead. The dead remained lying there. The injured, partly as well. It was very bad. Most attacks were repelled. It was difficult to climb the dike. We had a clear field of fire. They had to look for the foxholes. And by the time they saw them, they were often already dead.

By the end of January, the attacks became very severe. We had already suffered heavy losses. We were only a few men left, our ammunition was gone. The situation at that bridgehead was horrific.

While Jochem is on his journey through Belgium and England, a terrible battle breaks out at Kapelsche Veer.

Sequentially, Polish, British/Norwegian, and Canadian units attempt to drive the German defenders out of the virtually impregnable positions in and around the dike.

In a documentary broadcast in 2000 by EO, one of the defenders, Günther Brabeck, a second lieutenant of the 6th Fallschirmjäger Division, tells the following. I ended up on a bridgehead 1.5 km long and 300 m wide. In front of us the enemy, behind us the Maas. There was no other option; we had to fight. We had all come to terms with it. We all counted on not coming home again. It was a terrible death here. You were just finished off there. About like in the slaughterhouse.

In January 1945, this place was my home for four weeks. Here were our positions. A ruthless battle took



***Günther Brabeck***



Due to the heavy shelling, the bodies were repeatedly hit. As a result, the parts were scattered in the surrounding area. That smelt terrible. That sweet smell will stay with me my whole life.

The people who died on this bridgehead, on both sides, died completely in vain. For both parties, this had no value whatsoever. It was military ambition. A matter of prestige for both parties.



**Roman Stolarz**

One of the Allies, Lieutenant Roman Stolarz of the Polish Armoured Division, standing by the willow, says the following: You can't really use any other word for it. Only hell. There was one machine gun nest there and there was a second machine gun nest there (points east and west from the willow). And then the fighting began. There were immediately casualties who were hit by the mortar fire. I was standing next to Sztrybicki. I was standing right next to him. He was lying on the ground. A grenade fell between his legs. He was injured. I want to go back, he said. Suddenly, I also felt that I had been hit. I felt that my thigh started to bleed. It bled heavily. Blood everywhere.

Our military leadership, especially the General Staff, thought everything would go very smoothly, but this terrain was not suitable for conventional warfare. We should have had tank support. It was poorly planned, poorly organised. The soldiers were poorly prepared. Many mistakes were made. It's such a pity. People often say it was a pointless struggle. And that's true. How did it come to this? It was caused by the ambition of the commanders. It was their ambition to show the world: Look, we can handle this. The consequence of that was losing, losing, and losing again.

I have written a few words on the occasion of the event at Kapelsche Veer:

*Fate has decreed that this weeping willow  
As a silent witness mourned  
For the death of innocent victims  
Who fell during the battle for the Kapelsche Veer bridgehead.  
On both sides:  
The Allies and the Germans*



**Jim Morris**

in it and pulled it tight with my other hand and my teeth.

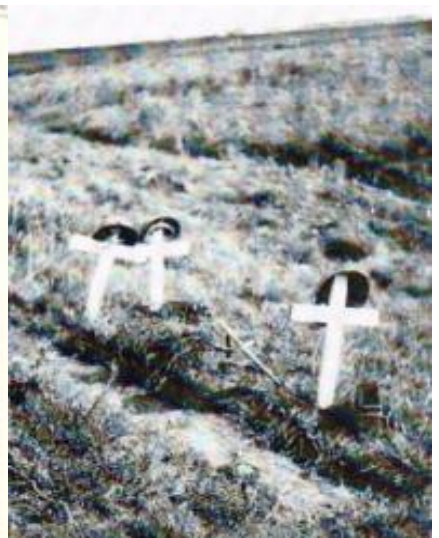
Jim Morris, corporal of the Canadian armoured division, assigned to the canoe command in the attack, tells about it: When it got light, they laid down a smoke screen. But after a few minutes, the wind changed and the smoke was gone. With the first shot fired at the boat, my hand was hit. The man at the back of the boat was hit by German machine gun fire and his head was half blown off. I don't know exactly. I only saw it when I turned around. It was just after I had been hit myself. I wanted to grab his paddle, but it was already gone. He fell overboard and had to make sure the canoe didn't capsize. Then I took a piece of bandage out of my helmet and wrapped it around my hand because it was bleeding heavily. I tied a knot



After almost all the canoes had been shot out of the water, Jim found himself, as one of the few, in the frontal attack by the Canadians over land. And continues. It was ruthless, and countless people perished. It was really terrible. I didn't participate in the man-to-man fights. I couldn't do that. Others did that. Because they attacked you from the bushes next to you, with bayonets, that was the way they fought. After offensive actions by Polish, British/Norwegian, and Canadian units in succession, the area near the Capelse ferry falls into Allied hands on Wednesday, January 31, 1945. Approximately one thousand (1000) soldiers are killed or wounded.

### **Canoe commandos practice in the Drongelens canal**

After the end of the fighting, the guarding of the southern bank of the Bergsche Maas is entrusted to a Belgian brigade until the liberation in May 1945. In the reconnaissance actions and skirmishes that still take place, the Belgians have to mourn a number of dead and wounded.



### **Field trenches along the dike at Kapelsche Veer**



After the fighting, the Canadians leave four Sherman tanks behind to secure the bridgehead.

On the left, a damaged Sherman tank on the road along the willow.





**Emergency bridge Old Maas at van Suijlekom 1945**



**The drawbridge before it was destroyed in WW2**



**The northern ramp of the emergency bridge, the Bailey part**

After the excavation of the Bergsche Maas, the ferry over the Oude Maasje will be replaced by a drawbridge. This is to prevent the need to use two ferry services in close proximity on the route between Capelle and Dussen.

During the fighting, the drawbridge is partially blown up. In January 1945, the Allies replaced the destroyed section with a 2-1 Bailey construction for the benefit of the combat actions at Kapelsche Veer. The photo on the left was taken after the war at the northern ramp. Standing on the left, Dina Rozenbrand, the wife of Wijnand Konings, and on the right, her sister Riek.

The reconstruction of the bridge over the Oude Maasje was tendered by Rijkswaterstaat on October 15, 1963, and in 1964, the famous "green arch bridge" was installed. It should be noted that the request from the municipality to Rijkswaterstaat to widen the bridge was not met because the arguments presented by the municipality were deemed insufficient.



**The northern ramp of the "Green Bridge"**

Of the participants in the patrol from December 29 to 30, 1944, three members are awarded the Polish Military Cross of Merit. J. Smit, son of Mayor Smit of Sprang-Capelle, is decorated by Polish General Maczek in Breda on October 28, 1945. Chris van Dongen and Henk Engelen receive their decoration from Major General Rudnicki, commander of the 1st Polish Armored Division, on March 1, 1946, at the town hall in Sprang-Capelle.

BEVELHEBBER NEDERLANDSE STRIJKKRACHTEN  
Afd.: BINNENLANDSE STRIJKKRACHTEN  
\*\*\*\*\*

Onderwerp: Hoofdkwartier te Velde  
Tevredenheids- 21 Januari 1945  
betuiging.  
No. 284  
Sectie IV.

Naar aanleiding van het rapport van den Commandant der Bewakingstroepen Sprang-Capelle d.d. 3 Januari 1945 en het schrijven van den Districts-Commandant te Waalwijk d.d. 5 Januari 1945, mij aangeboden bij Uw brief van 9 Januari 1945 no. 823, betuig ik mijn tevredenheid aan het personeel der Bewakings-compagnie te Sprang-Capelle wegens moedig gedrag in den nacht van 29 op 30 December 1944 bij een poging om een boot te water te brengen en het daarbij plaats vindend vuurgevecht, nadat ongeveer de helft der patrouille min of meer ernstig door een mijnongeval gewond was.

In verband hiermede nodig ik U uit het vorenstaande ter kennis te brengen van al Uw onderhebbend personeel en aan de betrokken negentien vrijwilligers een exemplaar van dit stuk te doen uitreiken.

DE BEVELHEBBER NEDERLANDSCHE STRIJKKRACHTEN  
De Luitenant-Generaal  
w.g. Bernhard  
AAN Prins der Nederlanden  
den Gewestelijken Commandant der Bewakingstroepen (45x)  
's-HERTOGENBOSCH

DYWIZYJNY SZWADRON C.K.  
1st Polish Arm'd Div.  
M.G. Coy.

To the Mayor of Sprang-Capelle

Your Excellency,

I wish to express my deep appreciation of the extremely gallant conduct of all members of the Dutch military organisations in face of the enemy, and my sympathy for the families of those wounded in action.

Yours sincerely  
w.g. M. Koehan  
Commanding Allied Forces in Sprang-Capelle.

Vertaling:

Aan de burgemeester van Sprang-Capelle

Edelachtbare heer,

Ik wens uitdrukking te geven aan mijn diepe bewondering voor het buitengewoon dappere gedrag van alle leden van de Nederlandse militaire organisaties in het aangezicht van de vijand, en aan mijn sympathie voor de gezinnen van degenen, die in het gevecht werden gewond.

Uw dw. dr.,  
w.g. K. Koehan  
Commandant van de geallieerde strijdkrachten te Sprang-Capelle



Order of Service medal from Ad Rijken



Sprang-Capelse OD'ers photographed in Waspik at the beginning of 1945.  
From left to right. Ad Rijken, Tjerk Hey, Adriaan Konings, Jan Okkers, Gerrit Kerst



## 8. The life of Jan and Dora at the end of the war from the UK to the Netherlands

The double ferry house and Jan's parental home, "the toll collector's house," were destroyed by the intense shelling during the Battle of Kapelsche Veer. According to Roitero in his book, more than 89,000 shells of various calibres were brought in for support.

According to Jan's diary, he was with the Van Beek family in Sprang on December 31, 1944, and February 18, 1945.

Marinus lived with the Van Beek family from October 1944 to May 5, 1945, due to the dangerous situation in Heusden.

In the excerpt from Jan's diary dated February 18, in the upper right corner, he is with Marinus and Willie in Sprang while the flying bombs roar over the house. He describes that their old house, filled with so many happy memories and one very sad one, the death of his mother, has been completely destroyed by the British Army because the Germans had turned it into a fortified position.

*Home to Holland again on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of Febr. '45. , every- thing well in the circumstances, Mother now with Marinus and Willie at v. Beek.*

*Still war over here with plenty of fly-bombs, some- times as many as three coming over at once.*

*Hard fighting had been going on on the ground between the new and old river Maas; - our old house; my old happy home with so many happy remembrances and a very very unhappy one; Mother's death.*

*Old house being totally destroyed by the British Army, through Germans having made a stronghold of it.*



***The ruins of Jan's childhood home***

Also on Sunday, April 16, 1945, Jan is back in Sprang-Capelle for 48 hours, where his mother and Marinus then live. After that, he returns to Melsbroek Airport near Zaventem, from where aircraft of 320 Squadron carry out operations in Northern Netherlands and Germany.

Home to Holland again on the 17<sup>th</sup> and  
18<sup>th</sup> of Febr. '45. , every thing well  
in the circumstances, Mother now  
with Marinus and Willie at v. Beeks.

Still war over here with plenty  
of fly-bombs, some-times as many as  
three coming over at once.

Hard fighting had been going on  
on the ground in-between the new  
and old river Maas; - our old house;  
my old happy home with so many  
happy remembrances and a very very  
unhappy one; Mothers death.

That house being totally destroyed by the  
British Army, through Germans having  
made a stronghold of it.

Dad's writing is sometimes hard to read so I'll translate it.

Home to Holland on the 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> February 1945, every thing well in the  
circumstances, Mother now with Marinus and Willie at Van Beeks.

Still war over herewith plenty of Fly-Bombs, some-times as many as three  
coming over at once.

Hard fighting had been on in the ground in-between the new and old  
river Maas,

Our old house, My old happy home with so many happy memories and  
a very very unhappy one; Mothers Death..

That house being totally destroyed by the British Army. Through Germans  
having made a stronghold of it.





320 Squadron conducts operations from Zaventem with the North American B-25 bomber, which has been in service with the squadron since 1943. On April 29, 1945, Jan departs by plane to Germany. He arrives at an airfield near Osnabrück that is full of bomb craters. The planes of 320 Squadron then carry out a number of operational flights from there, the last one on May 3, 1945. Jan then writes in his diary: "Victory day Wednesday the 8th of May '45." That means for him the end of the war.

**B25 (Mitchell) from 320 above the railway bridge Deventer dated 29-11-1944.**

Monday the 26<sup>th</sup> of April to Holland  
in 20 hours again. Mother-Willie and  
Maximus now lived in Spiess, Capelle  
- Our lorry broke down on the way  
back, stayed overnight in Roosendaal.  
- unmarked, landed there once before  
overnight six years ago.  
Back to Amsterdam by train the  
next day.

The end of April 45, here  
Melbush airfield - ZAVENTEM.  
The Army's advancing into  
Southern Germany and Holland,  
thousands of prisoners are being  
freed, - here Melbush is used  
as aerodrome from where the  
fellows are flown to England,  
I keep wondering whether I'll  
be amongst them.

29<sup>th</sup> of April 45, we're going to  
move into Germany.  
Our fellows ferry bombs to  
the new destination (station in

Germany) by ~~and~~ aircraft.  
We move on the 31<sup>st</sup> of April.  
I fly over with Maj. Berkhout,  
via Eindhoven, then turn right  
over Maas and Rijn, we saw  
the damaged town Goch and  
fighting area between Maas and  
Rijn. Arrived here, near  
Osnabrück, and under canvas  
again. This airfield being nothing  
but bomb craters.

The machines go on ops on the  
second of May, after that  
two times shown on the following  
day.

Last operational trip  
the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 1945.

~~24 hours 1 min.~~  
Tuesday the 7<sup>th</sup> of May 1945  
the Germans surrender  
Victory in Europe on from  
24 hours 1 min.

Victory day Wednesday the 8<sup>th</sup> of May '45.

### Fragment of Jan's diary from April 1945

When World War II ends in September 1945, Jan is still in England.

Jan often only has leave on weekends and can then visit Dora and Lena in Thornham. In November 1945, he obtained the Certificate of Competence Class II Group A in the field of Motor Mechanic there, and in April 1946, he was promoted to sergeant. He is informed on April 1, 1946, in Hendon that he will be stationed at RAF Henlow, 80 km northeast of London, where he reports on Monday, April 8. He works there as an instructor for Dutch boys in training. In 1947, he is stationed in Langham, Norfolk, which is closer to Dora and Lena.

Before he departs from England on November 13, 1947, he enjoys a "short leave (for business)" for the duration of three months.

## Translation of Dad's Writing

Monday the 16<sup>th</sup> of April to Holland on 40 hours again. Mother-Willie and Marinus now live in Sprang-Capelle - Our lorry broke down on the way back, stayed overnight in Roosendaal - remarkable, landed there once before overnight six years ago. Back to Zaventem by train the next day.

The end of April '45, here Melsbroek airfield - ZAVENTEM. The Army's advancing into Northern Germany and Holland, thousands of prisoners are being freed, - here Melsbroek is used as aerodrome from where the fellows are flown to England, I keep wondering whether Jim's amongst them.

29<sup>th</sup> of April '45, we're going to move into Germany. Our fellows ferry bombs to the new destination (station in

Germany) by our aircraft. We move on the 31<sup>st</sup> of April, I fly over with Maj. Beshkout, via Eindhoven, then turn right over Maas and Rhine, we saw the damaged town of Goch and fighting area in between Maas and Rhine. Arrived here, near Osnabruck, and under canvas again. This airfield being nothing but bomb craters.

The machines go on ops on the second of May, after that two times more on the following day.

Last operational trip the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1945.

Tuesday the 7<sup>th</sup> of May 1945 the Germans surrender Victory in Europe on from 24 hours 1 min.

Victory day Wednesday the 8<sup>th</sup> of May '45.

Monday the 16<sup>th</sup> of April to Holland on 40 hours again, Mother-Willie and Marinus now live in Sprang-Capelle - Our lorry broke down on the way back, stayed overnight in Roosendaal, remarkable, landed there once before overnight six years ago. Back to Zaventem by train next day.

The end of April 45, here Melsbroek airfield - Zaventem, The Army's advancing into Northern Germany and Holland, thousands of prisoners are being freed, - here Melsbroek is used as Aerodrome from where the fellows are flown to England.

I keep wondering whether Jim's amongst them. **(Jim is Mum's Brother who was captured and kept prisoner of war who died after the war with TB)**

29<sup>th</sup> of April 45, we're going to move into Germany.

Our fellows ferry bombs to the new destination (station in Germany by our Aircraft.)

We move on the 31<sup>st</sup> of April. I fly over with Major Beshkout via Eindhoven then turn right over Maas and Rhine, We saw the damaged town of Goch and fighting area in between Maas and Rhine. Arrived here near Osnabruck and under canvas again.

This airfield being nothing but Bomb craters.

The machines go on Op's on the 2<sup>nd</sup> May, after that two times more on the following day.

**Last operational trip the 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1945.**

**Tuesday the 7<sup>th</sup> May 1945 the Germans surrender, Victory in Europe on from 24 hours 1 min. VICTORY DAY WEDNESDAY THE 8<sup>th</sup> MAY 1945.**



### 9. The ferry service Capelle-Dussen.

On November 18, 1891, the ferry service over the newly dug Bergsche Maas was opened, initially with a hand cable ferry that was towed on busy days by a nearby steam sloop. Because the system does not meet expectations, the propulsion is placed on the ferry itself. On July 27, 1895, the new steam cable ferry service is put into operation.

In the Maasmond wet of 1883, it is stipulated in a Memorandum of Explanation from 1885 that the ferries over the Bergsche Maas are free of charge "for the preservation and restoration of the community on both sides of the river." (The wording "eternal" was not found in this context).



Steam ferry 1925 L.to.R. M. Ottevanger, Willem v. Drunen, Marien in't Veld and Marines de Ronde



Ferry powered by steam for WWII

Wietze Dijkstra, the son of Marinus, tells that his grandfather Lambertus sometimes, when there was one person, on foot or by bicycle, who wanted to cross the Maas, he did so with a long rowing boat instead of the ferry.



The ferry has encountered problems throughout its entire existence. At the beginning of the war, the Engineer of the Rijkswaterstaat writes to the meeting of the Mayor and Aldermen: "The ferry connection at the Capelsche ferry will be temporarily suspended around July 15, 1940, as the steam ferry will have to be used for the establishment of a ferry connection for vehicle traffic at the Keizersveer." The bridge there has been destroyed and "the repair will be expedited as much as possible." Also in December 1940, the Mayor and Aldermen announced that the Capelle ferry would be out of service for approximately 8 to 10 days due to repairs.

During the war, the ferry does operate, as can be seen in the schedule below from 1944.

**Announcement: Ferry under repair as of December 5, 1940**

RIJKSWATERSTAAT	
Dienstregeling Capelsche Veer. ingaaude 10 Februari 1944.	
Afvaarten van de Noordzijde	Afvaarten van de Zuidzijde
6.00, 6.30, 7.00 enz. om de 30 minuten tot 20.30	6.10, 6.40, 7.10 enz. om de 30 minuten tot 20.40
In het tijdvak tusschen 20.40 en 6.00 worden de afvaarten van beide oevers naar behoefte geregeld, met dien verstande, dat niet meer dan 2 maal per uur wordt afgevaaren.	

After the ferry became unusable due to the fighting at the end of 1944, it took a long time before there was again a crossing option for vehicles.

Immediately after the war, the Capelle ferry will indeed start operating again, but only by private individuals with a rowing boat; a person with a bicycle has to pay 15 cents for that!!!

### Ferry schedules 1944

### Transporting people with bicycles by rowing boat



A letter to the Directorate-General for Public Works and Water Management, Breda District, requests the Mayor and Aldermen of Sprang-Capelle on October 10, 1945, to put the Capelse ferry back into operation as soon as possible. They provide a justification and state that they are concerned because, until now, there has been no indication of any preparations for this repair. They conclude with: "We therefore kindly request that you commence these preparations as soon as possible, including making the access roads to the ferry ready." Only on August 17, 1946, Rijkswaterstaat took over the rowing boat traffic, and the crossing became free again. Source The Echo, August 10, 1948.

On October 2, 1946, the Mayor and Aldermen once again write to the Directorate-General for Public Works and Water Management that the ferry crossing at the Capelsche ferry is still taking place by means of a rowboat. They point out the stagnation in passenger and freight transport and the financial damage, also for the surrounding municipalities.

They insistently urge a solution and refer to a letter from July 1940 in which the situation regarding the significance of the ferry was already further elaborated and argued.

After the ferry is back in operation in November, it is put out of service in 1947 due to frost, and in 1951 the measure is taken that the ferry only crosses when it is completely full. This is a government measure in connection with "fuel conservation."

The toll house was largely destroyed in the fighting and completely demolished after the war.

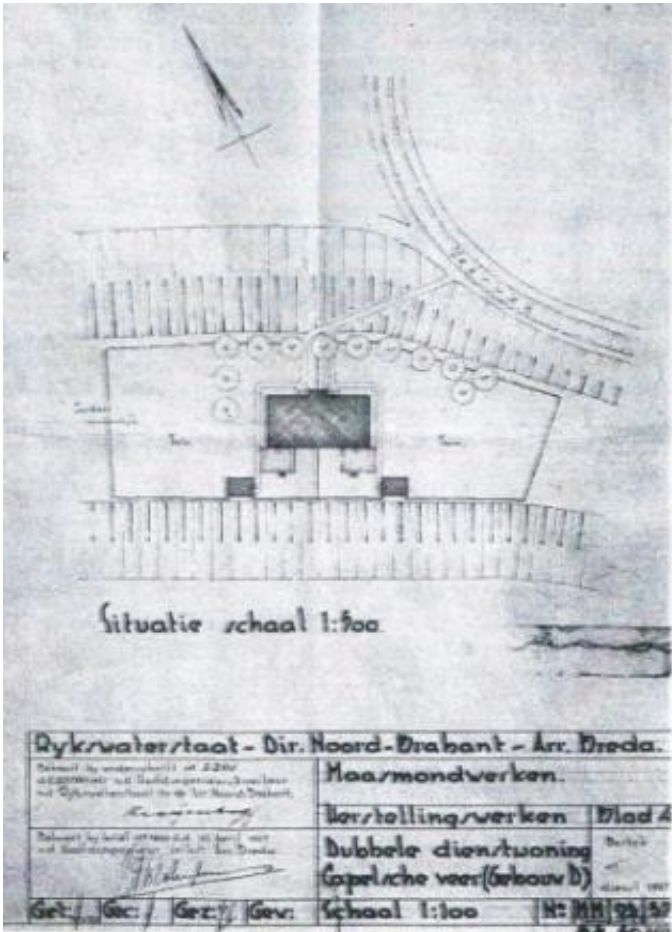


In contrast, the double ferry house was rebuilt by the Directorate-General for Public Works and Water Management in 1948.

On the drawing, the ferry house. It is located on the Veerweg at the bend of the section that runs from the weeping willow to the ferry landing of the Bergsche Maas.

The drawing is part of a specification dated April 24, 1947, in which it is referred to by Rijkswaterstaat as the "Dubbele dienstwoning Capelsche veer" (Building D).

The house belongs to the Arrondissement Breda of the Directorate North Brabant and falls under the repair works of the Maasmondwerken. Names of residents of the ferry house who lived there between October 4, 1948, and November 9, 1987, include: De Jong, De Vries, Van Kappel, Kieboom, Schreurders-Stevens, Huibert Schreurders, Lastdrager Kromwel, G.J. Stevens, and W. Stevens. There was never water, electricity, or gas; people cooked with butane gas. The drinking water was brought in by boat and stored in a special water well, from where it was pumped for use.



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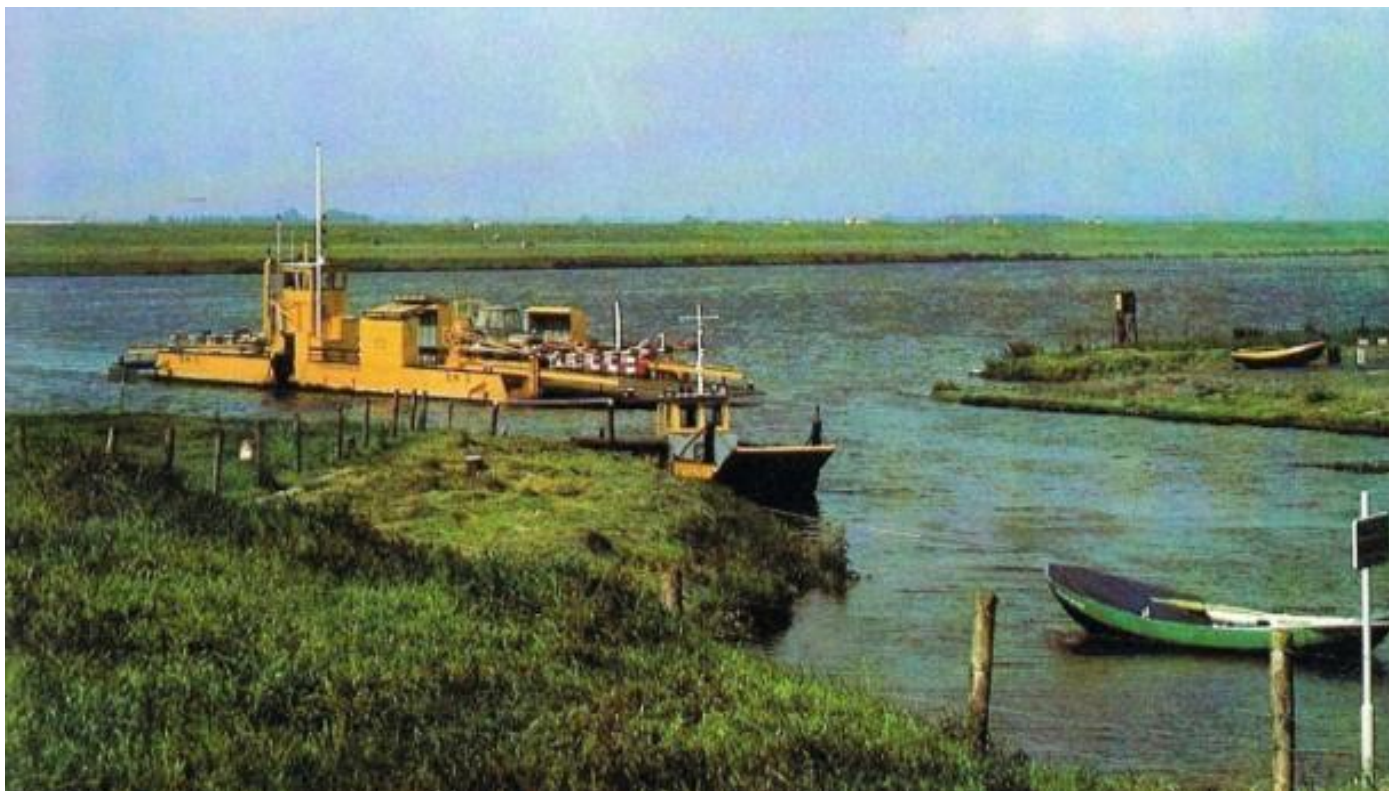
Stevens, and W. Stevens.

There was never water, electricity, or gas; people cooked with butane gas. The drinking water was brought in by boat and stored in a special water well, from where it was pumped for use.

**Joop Stevens on the ferry in 1972      The double ferry house during Queen's Day 1983**



Former ferry captain Piet Treffers explains that a non-functioning ferry is pulled across by hand. An additional, thinner cable is installed a bit higher. With loose pull sticks, which can be clamped to the cable, the captain and the passengers pull the ferry while walking until they can no longer go further, and then they start again.



**The BM 3 around 1980**

As of February 1, 2009,

Rijkswaterstaat transfers the Bergsche Maas ferries to the riverside municipalities, which jointly establish the Bergsche Maasveren Foundation. With the objective that, among others, the Capelse ferry will remain free to use for at least another 30 years. The participating municipalities of Aalburg, Heusden, Waalwijk, Werkendam, and Zaltbommel each provide a representative for the board, and the representative from Waalwijk, Mr. J. van Groos, is the chairman of the foundation on behalf of Waalwijk.

Nowadays, the BM 10 operates at the Capelse Veer, Dussen - Sprang-Capelle, which has a load capacity of 45 tons and can transport about 15 cars at once. When crossing, the ferry is still kept in check by a steel cable. The operation of the ferries is outsourced to captains from ODV Maritiem BV. This organization, based in Zwijndrecht, provides personnel for, among other things, bridges, locks, and of course, ferries.

We conclude the chapter on the Capelle ferry with a few definitions. A ferry is the place where one can be transported across a river. A ferry is a pontoon. A ferry is a vessel used to transport people, vehicles, etc. over water. Synonyms for "pont" are "ferry" and "ferryboat."

Kapelsche veer is the topographical name during World War II for the area south of the Bergsche Maas and east of the Veerweg.

A bridgehead is a piece of land captured on the other side of an obstacle (e.g., a river) from which the attacker can continue their offensive action.

We wonder if there would have been so many unnecessary casualties to mourn if the Allies and the Germans had understood and, above all, accepted that it was not about Kapelsche veer, but about Capelse veer.



## **10. Jan and Dora from the Netherlands to Australia**

Jan has been demobilized in England and he is returning to Holland with his wife Dora and daughter Lena Elizabeth. Upon their arrival in the Netherlands on November 14, 1947, the family, due to a lack of housing, moved in with brother Marten on Rijnkade in South Arnhem.

On November 21, 1947, Jan leaves the military for the first time and goes on extended leave. After a short time, they move to Heusden and live for a period with father and stepmother in the house on Wilhelminaplein in Heusden. There, on January 7, 1948, daughter Ina is born. Afterwards, they get their own house on Berenklaauwstraat, in Arnhem-South, where they move in on December 12, 1949.

Ina says that her father cannot find a suitable position in civilian society.

According to Article 21 of the Conscription Act, Jan is "permitted" to enter active service as of November 1948.

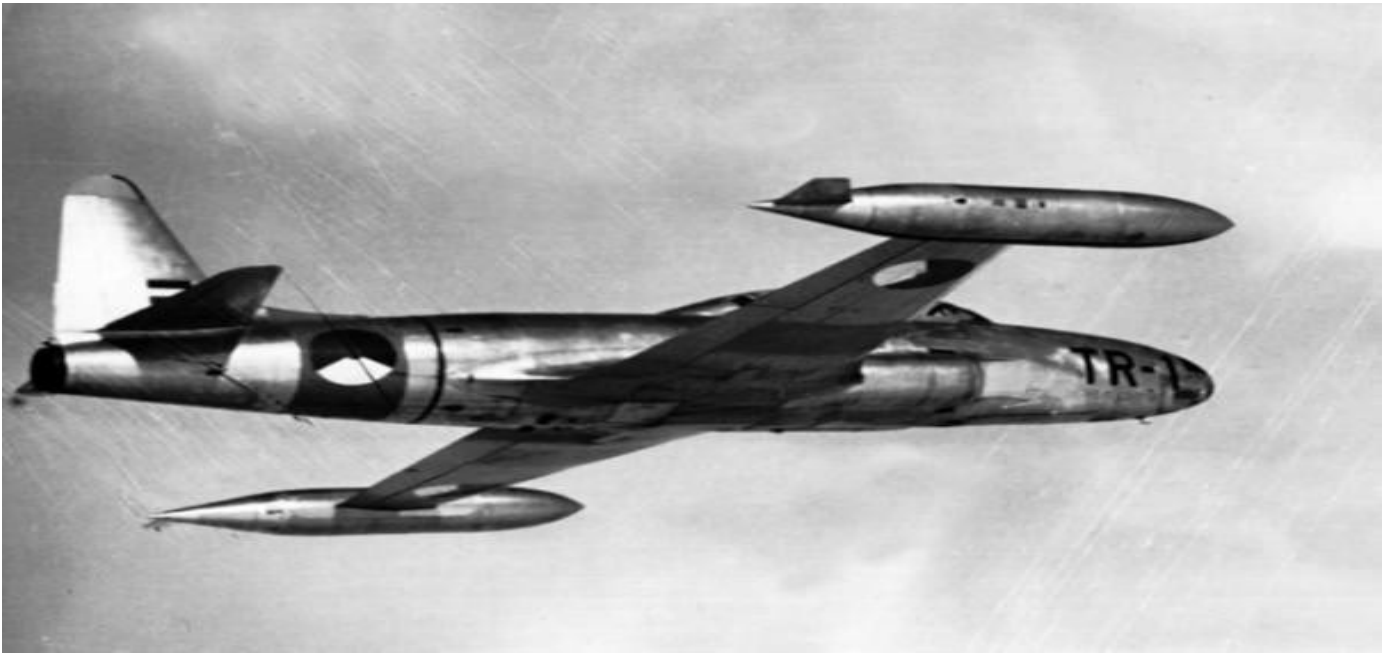


**Grandpa Lambertus, mother Dora, grandma Martha, father Jan, Lena, and in the car, Ina. In 1948 possibly at the Heusden bridge**

On September 16, 1949, he was promoted to sergeant-motor mechanic 1st class. In October 1949, he signs a contract as a volunteer for a period of six years with the Army Air Force of the Netherlands, then still part of the Royal Netherlands Army.

In that year, he receives his bronze medal for twelve years of honest and faithful service, and it is officially confirmed that his years of service from May 1940 to May 1945 count double according to the Pension Act of 1922.

In 1948 and 1949, Jan worked as an instructor at Deelen Air Base. In 1950, Jan is sent on a course for the American Thunderjet fighter aircraft. He then goes to an American airbase near Munich. The Netherlands first receives 21 Thunderjet F-84E's in 1951, which are soon replaced by 166 Thunderjet F-84G's. They are stationed at Volkel Air Base.



**The Thunderjet F84**

In 1953, the Air Force became independent and was then granted the title Royal. The Royal Netherlands Air Force flies the Thunderjet type until 1956. The early years were marked by many fatal accidents due to inexperience. The KLu lost 50 Thunderjets in five years. Jan is employed at the Air Force Technical School and is registered with the KLu. He works, among other places, in Bussum, at Twente Air Base, at Soesterberg Air Base, and he is temporarily assigned to KLM Schiphol in 1954.



Jan & Dora Dykstra  
in Holland about 1953

Jan's father, Lambertus Dijkstra, the lighthouse keeper, passed away on October 25, 1953.

Motorcycling is also popular in the Netherlands. Jan buys a second-hand sidecar and fixes it up, see the photo on the left taken in 1953.

In Arnhem, on February 2, 1955, Allan is born, son of Jan and Dora.

After signing a permanent contract in 1955, he is honorably discharged from voluntary service on his request on March 1, 1956, and as GD sergeant major of the 1939 class of the Royal Air Force, he goes on extended leave for the second time.

This is final, on October 1, 1959, he is dismissed due to service termination and is entitled to his accrued military pension in 1979.





**Dad Jan waves. To his left, from right to left, Ina, Lena, and Ma Dora.**

They emigrated to Australia in 1956. Jan's family departs from Rotterdam on March 13, 1956, aboard the M.S. Sibatak and arrives in Sydney on April 18.

In Australia, they live for a year on the coast south of Sydney in a place called Bulli. They are going to live in a garage owned by a Dutch couple who also emigrated a few years earlier.

Already on April 26, 1956, he starts working as an engine mechanic for Trans Australia Airlines. T.A.A. is then a state airline that eventually merges with Qantas, the oldest and largest airline in Australia.



**Jan Dykstra second from the left with his TAA colleagues in 1961**

Ina tells that in November 1957, they buy a piece of land in Revesby with a garage on it where we can live. There they have a house built where we move in September 1959. On January 13, 1958, Jan becomes an Australian citizen. And on August 5, 1959, Marten, Jan's brother and former resident of the house on the dike, passed away. Her father Jan works for T.A.A. for 25 years. When he stops working in June 1985, they move to a smaller house in a retirement village in Camden, NSW (New South Wales).

**Jan on Allan's Motorcycle**



**Mom and Dad on a trip from Sydney to Perth by Indian Pacific Train on October 30, 1980**



**Dad on the Georges River Milperra April 1991**



**Pa Jan and Ma Dora in August 1997**



### 11. History of the weeping willow.

In 1932, the willow was planted. It is a plant from the willow family of the genus *Salix* (willow) and an unnamed variety of the species *Babylonica* (weeping willow).

Willows, with ten native species, are one of the most characteristic trees and shrubs of our original wet and marshy delta. The *Salix Babylonica* is non-native and originally comes from northern China. It appears around 1675 in France and is discovered in the Netherlands by Linnaeus in 1735. In the Netherlands, eight cultivated varieties of the species are grown, which are very difficult to name. The most common is the yellow weeping willow, which used to be referred to by the beautiful name *Salix Alba Tristis*. Given the color in the spring, our willow may belong to this species. It is certain, however, that it is a male weeping willow.



The "weeping willow" through the years

To the question of whether the brothers Jan and Marinus planted multiple willows, Ina replies: "It is possible that more trees were planted, and because the others have disappeared and the consequences—the remaining tree becomes a monument—they only talk about this one." Jan could never have imagined that the willow he planted would become a symbolic reminder of a battle at the Capelse ferry.

According to Capelle resident Sebrecht - Sipke - Vos, Dijkstra planted that weeping willow.

When, after the war, the remnants of the trees on the dike were about to be cleared, Sipke Vos (according to Jenny Schoondermark) saved the weeping willow by going to the municipality of Sprang-Capelle with the request to spare the weeping willow as a reminder of the horrors that took place there.

Two former soldiers who had previously shared their experiences during the battles in this story also recall their memories of the willow. Second Lieutenant Günther Brabeck says, pointing at the willow: "This tree was considerably smaller back then." "There was half a horse hanging in it, we kept looking at it." Lieutenant Roman Stolarz says while standing by the willow: "That tree over there actually belonged to a thicket." "Back then, there was a thicket here, there were bushes and trees."

In the book FALL BRAUN/THE STRUGGLE FOR KAPELSCHE VEER 1944-1945, there are two images of the willow then and now, with the following text: The willow, which was part of a ring of windbreak trees around the tollkeeper's house, became the post-war symbol of the struggle for Kapelsche Veer. It is the only remaining relic from that time, which serves as a reminder of the wartime violence and still marks the site of the event.

In 1984, the willow is treated by a company from Utrecht. In the existing cavities, iron rods are installed for reinforcement, drainage is applied, and the interior is impregnated. Additionally, advice is given on aftercare. Annually, for a period of five years, clean the cavities, check the water-draining drainage, and re-impregnate, which should be done carefully, preferably during a dry period in the summer. During these annual tasks, the overall stability of the tree should be assessed.



Joop Stevens, a relative of the ferryman, plants a cutting of the willow tree by his house on Burg Smitstraat in Sprang. The tree grows so large after a few years that it is cut down.

In July 2009, specialized employees from the outdoor service of the municipality of Waalwijk prune the willow. The trunk is rotten on one side. To preserve the tree, it is "candelabered," which means it is pruned back into the shape of a candelabrum.

During the work, three cuttings are taken which are then intensively cared for at the municipal yard.

During a move at the municipal yard, employee Nico de Rooij comes across the three cuttings, which had already grown quite a bit in the meantime. He has asked our local history association to consider whether it makes sense to place one or more of the four-year-old cuttings at the Capelse ferry.

**Willow as a "candelabrum" in 2009**





**Photographed on Easter Monday 2016 shortly after the fatal gust of wind.**



#### **Most recent photo from March 2017**

During the storm on Easter Monday, March 28, 2016, the willow tree is severely damaged. The Brabants Dagblad reports: The willow tree by the monument at the Capelse ferry, which commemorates "The Battle of Kapelsche Veer," has been toppled by the wind. A part of the tree has broken off and fallen to the ground. After the tree has been pruned and the branches removed, it turns out that the monumental willow can still be preserved.

#### **Internal shoot**

Inside the tree, there is a shoot, the top and a side branch of which have been cut off at the bottom. There are no further shoots on the inner shoot, probably because there is too little light.

The cutting of the shoot inside the tree was done by the tree surgeon, who had previously installed a steel reinforcement in the tree. In this case, this "shoot" was in the way, and little could be seen of the recovery that might occur.



**Cut-off shoot above**



**Cut-off shoot below**



**The stamen: the "male catkin" of the willow**

The tree crew of the municipality of Waalwijk has planted the three mentioned willow cuttings on the municipal land adjacent to the General Cemetery "Bloemendaal." The intention is that, once they have developed well, these cuttings will be planted at the site of the monument. This will be done in collaboration with the Heemkundevereniging Sprang-Capelle.



**The eight-year-old cuttings at Bloemendaal Cemetery**



## 12. History monument.

In the first few decades after the war, there are no commemorations at the Capelle ferry or by the weeping willow that stands there. People are busy with the reconstruction and usually have enough with the personal processing of the events in the five-year-long war. The willow grew slowly, from a tree damaged by shells to an unrecognised, monumental witness of the struggle.



Nine years after the battles at the Capelse ferry, the Echo publishes a report on the course of the Canadian contribution to the battles at the Maase. This was prepared by the headquarters of the Canadian army in Ottawa. Not the entire report, but the introduction and the conclusion are depicted above. It is one of the first signals of the call for a monument at the Capelse ferry, which was given by the newspaper's editorial team on Monday, November 30, 1953.

Does the population of Sprang-Capelle not know that prior to the battle, during a patrol, Sprang-Capelle OD members were injured, that there were terribly inhumane fights, how many lives it cost, that it was a senseless struggle, that after the war residents died from leftover war debris, that Mr. G. Hall, father of a fallen soldier, visits every two years from Canada the place where his son fell?

Slowly, the population is beginning to realize what happened near Sprang-Capelle.

In 1971, father Jan and mother Dora and son Allan return "home" to Holland. After 15 years, they visit all those old places again. It is the first time since emigrating to Australia that they are returning to Europe. They had to work hard to build a living and raise their family. At that time, Ina and David receive the photos of the tree. Later, communication also arises about placing the plaque and the ceremony commemorating the end of the battle at the Capelse ferry. Father Jan then realizes how important the tree is as a monument.



**Photo was taken during the visit to Holland in 1971.**

After that first visit, father and mother go to Holland every few years to visit that place. Jan receives an invitation in 1984 to attend the opening ceremony of the monument commemorating the Battle of Kapelsche Veer, which is to be placed under the willow. But he doesn't go. Jan and Min Vos, good friends of the Dykstra family, are coming over from Australia and are going there together with the Schoondermark-de Jong family. Alderman Henk Roskam of Sprang-Capelle is committed to the realization of a monument. He writes in the Liberation Edition 1990 of Het Bruggeske:

In 1980, the float from the Poolsestraat/W.v.Gentsvaart expresses gratitude to the 1st Polish Armoured Division during the parade for the liberation festivities. While creating the design for that float, the thought of a reunion of the division's survivors with the population creeps into my mind. To give shape to that reunion, a committee of 10 residents of Sprang-Capelle is formed.

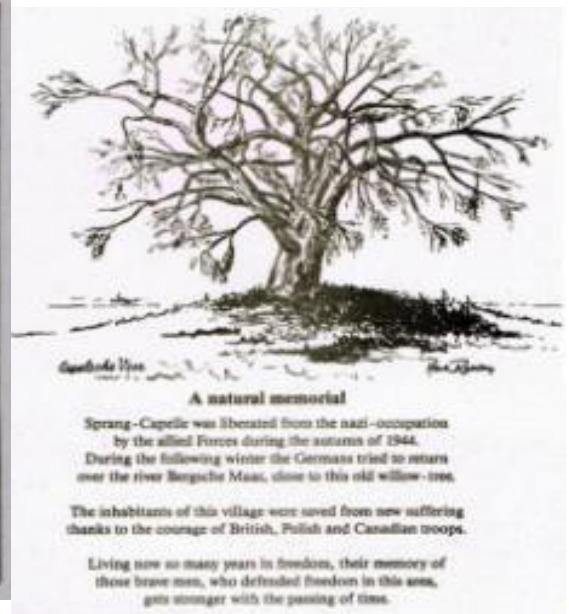
**First wreath-laying at the willow on May 5, 1980, still without a monument**



On May 5, 1980, an impressive ceremony takes place around the majestic willow at the Capelse Veer. A platoon from the National Reserve forms the honour guard. "Sirena" plays sacred music and the national anthems. The mayor and aldermen, war veterans, and the Polish embassy secretary lay wreaths, watched by many hundreds of interested onlookers.



An apotheosis was inevitable. The committee and the schools raise funds, and on May 4, 1985, a bronze memorial plaque is unveiled in the same setting. In addition to the entire municipal council, the embassies of Canada, Great Britain, and Poland, as well as the Dutch Minister of Defense and the churches, are represented.



With the above text, the people of Sprang-Capelle honor the Allied soldiers who dedicated themselves to their freedom.

Drawing and text by Henk Roskam



### **Parkeerruimte**

Nabij het oorlogsmonument aan de Maas in Sprang-Capelle is de stratemaker in opdracht van Rijkswaterstaat in actie gekomen om de parkeerruimte te fatsoeneren. Hij heeft zijn werk goed gedaan. De automobilist kan nu zonder het verkeer van en naar het Capelse veer te hinderen even stil blijven staan en zijn gedachten of herinneringen aan de verschrikkingen van de Tweede Wereldoorlog de vrije loop laten. (Foto Dick Sars).

In early 1990, contact is established between the municipal council of Sprang-Capelle and survivors of the "Liberation" Brigade. The then second lieutenant Tabary (now major general) expressed the desire for a lasting tribute to the fallen members of his unit.



That results in the organization of a memorial ceremony on Friday, May 4, 1990. The names of the – Belgian – fallen soldiers will then be immortalized on-site at the Monument by the Capelse ferry. (End of text Henk Roskam).



**Drik van der Zanden at the monument**

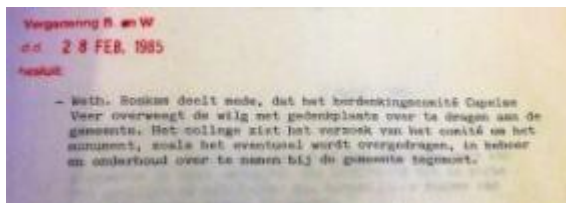
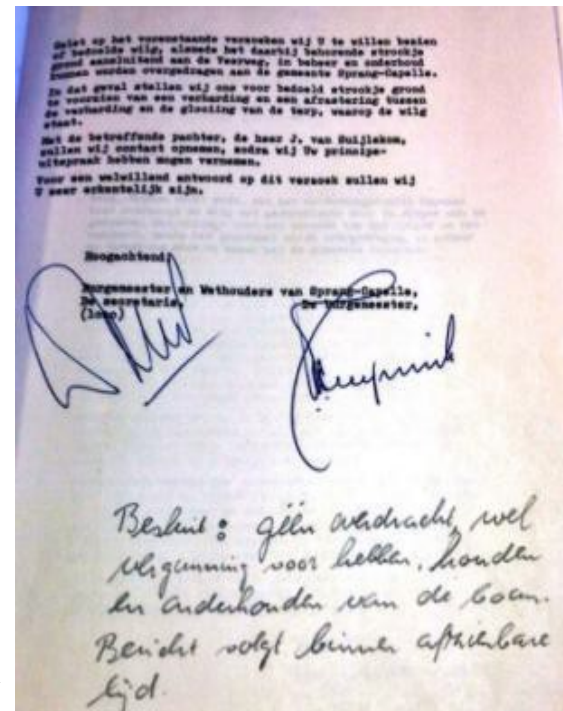
Subsequently, the plaque of The Lincoln & Welland Regiment on behalf of The L&W Reg't Association in 1997 and the plaque of the South Alberta Regiment (SAR) as a salute from all officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers, all SAR veterans, are installed.







Finally, the plaque is installed as a tribute to The Norwegian Commando Company. They were then added to 47 Royal Marines Commando, thereby becoming part of No 5 Troop / 10 Inter-Allied Commando.



In a letter dated May 24, 1989, to the municipality of Sprang Capelle with the subject: Transfer of ownership of the southern river dike of the Bergsche Maas, the following is stated. The State intends to transfer ownership of the parcels, cadastral known as municipality of Capelle section K, nos. 83 registered, 84 registered, together approximately 0.04.63 ha, to the Hoogheemraadschap West-Brabant in Breda (now part of the Waterschap Brabantse Delta). On the aforementioned parcels, a permit was granted to you by deed dated April 10, 198, no. 84/0841, effective January 1, 1986, until further notice, for the preservation of a war monument. The aforementioned right will continue to run after the transfer of ownership has taken place, as long as nothing else is or will be agreed upon by you with the aforementioned water board, only the compensation currently owed to the State will then be owed to the water board.



On January 31, 2007, the Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen Departement Langstraat and the Committee 4 and 5 May in Waalwijk offered an information panel to be placed at the monument.



The panel is anchored in the ground of Rijkswaterstaat, which means they are the owner of the panel. The content of the panel is aimed at recreational cyclists following an ANWB bike route. On the same day, the Christian Primary School "De Bron" adopts the monument by the willow tree for a period of 10 years. In the summer of 2007, a discussion arises about the content of the panel. In response, the responsible alderman of the municipality of Waalwijk initiates an investigation. A committee of four people chaired by Prof. Dr. J.H.C. Blom conducts the investigation at the NDA (Netherlands Defence Academy) and the NIMH (Netherlands Institute for Military History). Based on the committee's advice, a new information board was installed on Tuesday, May 28, 2008.





According to several residents, the newly placed sign, see image above, is not correct. On September 3, 2008, a petition with 1200 signatures is presented to the mayor of Waalwijk. The gist of it is that a new information board should be put up again. As far as the municipality is concerned, the discussion about the sign is closed.



#### **Commemoration with Foundation Pheasant on February 1, 2014**



The director of PCBS De Bron, Mr. Arriën voor de Poorte, writes upon request:  
As a school, we have adopted the monument. We have indicated to the municipality that we want to continue this. We find it important that the children are aware of significant events from history, especially when they have occurred so close to home. Additionally, we find it important that those who fought for our freedom are commemorated. Annually, we are present with a number of students at the commemoration at the monument around January 31.

There we lay a floral arrangement and sometimes children read a poem. Additionally, for the past few years, guests have been drinking

#### **Students from De Bron read a poem at the 2015 memorial.**

coffee at school after the memorial service. On May 4th, we also lay a floral tribute with a number of students at the monument and at the war grave of Ian Adams at the general cemetery on Heistraat, and afterwards we go to the gathering at the Reformed Church in Sprang where we participate in the commemoration.





In February 2015, the plaques of the Belgian and Norwegian military units are stolen, after which temporary plastic plates are installed. In the weekend of April 2 and 3, 2016, two more bronze plaques disappear from the monument.

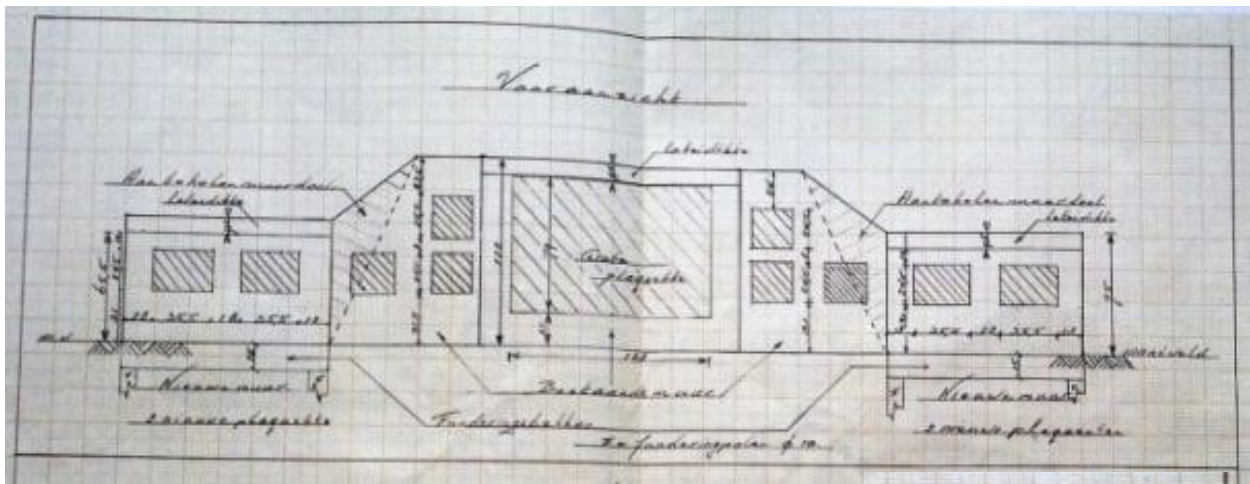


To prevent the last large central plaque from being stolen, the Municipality of Waalwijk is having the large plaque, which was the first to be placed, removed. The masonry with the temporary plastic plates will also be removed. A framework is being placed with an image of the original monument on canvas. The wind does the rest. First, a part of the monumental willow is felled. Finally, the plastic replica is blown to pieces.

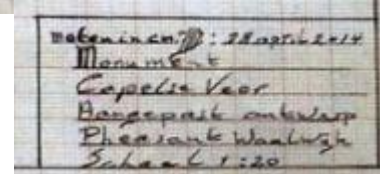
Spring 2016

Autumn 2016





**Construction drawing of the new monument dated April 28, 2014**



The Overdiepse Polder, the area where the monument is located, is now part of the national project "Room for the River." That means, among other things, that the dike along the Bergsche Maas has been lowered and that the farms have been built on six-meter-high mounds. The new monument is therefore constructed with waterproof dark red bricks, and the top of the monument is covered with natural stone slabs. The stones and masonry are waterproof. The whole is a lot longer than the original monument. The new monument is a total of six meters long and the central part is 1.10 meters high. The original and largest plaque will be placed back in it. In the wing walls and the low extensions, a total of ten smaller plaques will be installed, made of cast stone and protected against graffiti.



On four plaques, the same text appears as on the stolen plaques depicted earlier above. There will be five plaques with new texts. One for the Poles, one for the English, two for the Canadians. One for the dedication of the local Order Service, which plaque is offered by the Heemkundevereniging Sprang-Capelle. There will also be a plaque without text.

The paving for the monument consists of red stones and connects to the existing road. The whole area is 21 meters wide. In the pavement, white arrows come from three directions, symbolizing the waves of attack by the Poles, English, and Canadians.

**Construction site at the monument set up on May 3, 2017**

The Information Point Kapelsche Veer / Foundation V.O.G.W. (Foundation Friends of the War Graves of the Allies Waalwijk and Surroundings) has stated upon request that they will not cooperate in the realization of this article, citing among other reasons that they only provide information to professionals.



On behalf of the municipality of Waalwijk, the alderman responsible for the replacement of the monument, Mr. Jan van Groos, has stated the following upon request:

In my opinion, the municipality is the owner of the monument and the Brabantse Delta water board of the associated land.

The agreements regarding the commemorations around January 31 - the monument is also visited by delegations at other times of the year - are that the municipality organizes the commemoration once every 5 years and that the Pheasant Foundation does this in the intervening years;

Agreement has been reached on the design of the new monument. The wall will be expanded to make room for 6 additional plaques. The smaller plaques will be made of cast stone, so they are not attractive to thieves.

The bronze central plaque remains in place despite the sometimes disturbing errors to honor the initiative from the public and to show that our understanding of what happened can be limited. There is no longer any

disagreement about the material to be used, except for the cover plate. Between the monument and the road, paving will be installed. The site for the monument has already been expanded, and as part of the adaptation of the Overdiepse Polder, an 'artwork' has been placed where people can sit.

The following parties were involved in the discussion: Foundation Pheasant (Ton Guezen), Heemkundevereniging (Hans Bakkenist), foundation V.O.G.W. (Marius Heideveld), adoptieschool De Bron (Arriën voor de Poorte), and several individuals such as Mr. Wim van Klaveren and Mr. Dick Vos. Among other reasons due to too far diverging opinions, the municipality has taken over the management since the beginning of this year and has informed the representative of the Pheasant Foundation that no further reliance will be placed on him in this matter;

The most persistent discussion so far has been about which units should also receive a plaque and what text should accompany it. There is agreement on the (text for the) Guard Troops (OD) and also for the 1st Polish Armoured Division. Everyone also agrees on a plaque for the No.47 Royal Marine Commando and The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada, but not yet on the text. There is still discussion about The New Brunswick Rangers and the Algonquin Regiment. As long as the discussion is not closed, nothing can be said about the revelation;

At the moment, it is still the case that the municipality organizes a commemoration every 5 years. Because there is a desire for an annual commemoration, after the unveiling of the new monument, an organization will be sought to take this on;

Replacing the information board is also a sensitive issue. Because the new monument, with the addition of the extra plaques that will be placed in chronological order if possible, conveys more about the struggle, the information board could be replaced. The discussion about this is still ongoing. Additionally, there is the idea of creating a link to a site with much more information about the Kapelsche ferry using a QR code.

The Local History Association is engaged in various ways with the history of Sprang-Capelle and thus also with the Kapelsche ferry. It cannot be ruled out that over time the HKV will succeed in uncovering even more information and/or that they will be involved in the commemoration. End of text Mr. Van Groos.

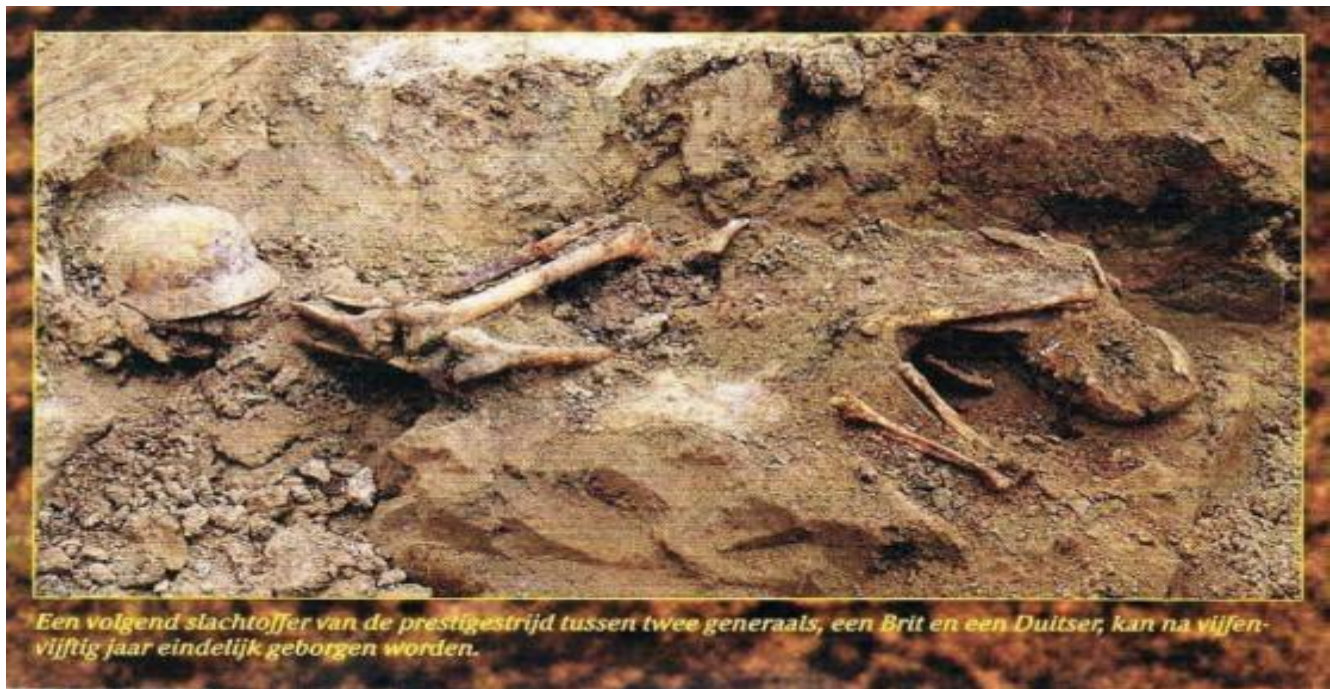


### 13. Remains and material remnants of the battle.

Even before the battle breaks out in full force, two civilian casualties have already fallen. On December 6, 1944, Henk and Jo van Suijlekom and Jan van der Galiën, the seventeen-year-old farmhand, drive with horse and cart to the vacant farmhouse by the bridge over the Oude Maasje to pick up some belongings. Jo is on his bicycle. Arriving at the farm, which is in no man's land under German observation, he wants to open the gate. Suddenly, there is a tremendous bang and a huge cloud of smoke. The left front wheel of the cart hits a mine. Henk is thrown into a pit of beets and meters away lies Jan. Jan is instantly dead. Henk dies a few days later from the abdominal wound as a result of the explosion.

After the war, not all remnants of the battle are cleared away. The excavation work for the initiated land consolidation is life-threatening due to the unexploded shells. Especially along the road by the willow, there are many remnants of munitions.

In 1950, on a Monday afternoon in March, a fatal accident occurs in the Overdiepsche polder. A grenade explodes and 14-year-old Janus de Jong, son of the ferryman of the Capelle ferry, is fatally struck. It is assumed that two mortar shells washed ashore and that the victim started playing with them. The body of the young victim is terribly mutilated. Amid great public interest, he was laid to rest the following Friday at the General Cemetery in Zaltbommel.



On Tuesday, January 25, 2000, the Brabants Dagblad writes: "Presumably two German soldiers found." Bergsche Maasdijk reveals bodies." Members of the military Recovery and Identification Service meticulously scrub the earth off the yellowed bones with small shovels and brushes. Identification tags, equipment, and dental records can also aid in the identification as everything is examined in a barracks in Bussum. The team works under the leadership of Captain H. Jongen, nicknamed Harry the Nose. Known for his experience in locating and exhuming bodies. His nose was an important tool in this. They report that at this spot on the dike between Dussen and Sprang-Capelle, they have certainly unearthed fourteen Germans since August 1999, and in 1972, eighteen were already unearthed here. At that time, further digging was not allowed due to the risk of damaging the dikes.

In the same article, it is written that, according to statements by historian D.J. Roitero, Polish soldiers killed wounded Germans. An article from the same newspaper on January 27, 2000, states: "Poles did not kill wounded German prisoners." Various amateur historians, including B. Zijlmans from Geertruidenberg and J. Didden, state in that article that Roitero's claim is very unlikely.

## Recovery and Identification in the Discovery of Human Remains in 2010



**The Explosive Ordnance Disposal Service neutralized unexploded grenades in June 2014, just weeks after the dike excavation began.**



When the lowering of the dike along the Bergsche Maas begins in June 2014, it quickly becomes clear that munitions must first be cleared under expert supervision. The excavation is halted, and various remnants of the battles are found, such as equipment, helmets, food cans, canteens, a lot of small-caliber ammunition, hand grenades, and larger artillery shells. Some objects are buried up to two and a half meters deep. Two more bodies of soldiers are also being uncovered.

After 70 years, in April 2015, the remains of a Canadian soldier are identified. It concerns Albert Laubenstein, born in Saskatoon from Alberta, who served in the Lincoln & Welland Regiment. He falls during Operation Elephant, the last Allied action during the Battle of Kapelsche Veer. He is buried in a temporary field grave near the Capelse ferry on January 26, 1945; after the war, he is not found and is reported missing. In 2014, during excavation work in the current Overdiepse Polder, his field grave is found.

At the Recovery and Identification Service, Laubenstein's dental record is present by chance, through which he is recognized. He is reburied with military honors at the Canadian War Cemetery in Bergen op Zoom. This takes place in the presence of the relatives, including a cousin.

**Ammunition remains**



#### 14. Epilogue.

The monument and the willow tree have over the years become a place of special significance for many who visit, some may even want to ask a question to the tree that saw everything. Some of those visits are depicted at the conclusion of Ina's story to our local history association.

It begins immediately after the end of the fighting. When the last Germans have left the "island," the local population is curious about what there is to see.



The horror of the battle is still clearly palpable there. Fallen Germans, still unburied, dead livestock, a terrible stench, and a lot of war equipment. Like shot-up Sherman tanks. Especially young people crawl onto the tanks and have themselves filmed and photographed. The accompanying photo comes from a film by the liberators about the liberation of Brabant.

It is not an official wedding location, but when Dick Vos gets married in 1988, he takes his bride to the willow tree in a sporty Opel Manta to take "wedding photos."

That is of course not strange because his bride is Sandra van Suijlekom, daughter of Jo van Suijlekom, who grew up in the farmhouse across the Old Maasje.



Donna Swift's father, Private Oliver MacLaugh, is assigned to Company B of the Canadian Lincoln and Welland Regiment. On January 26 and 27, 1945, his unit advanced from Waspik via the Maasdijk to the Kapelsche ferry. He is wounded by a German sniper and after a night in the freezing cold, he is rescued and ultimately survives the fighting.

He dies in 1975 without telling about his experiences. After her sister previously tried in vain to find the "island," Donna and her husband come to Sprang-Capelle on Friday, April 13, 2012. Together with members of our local history association, she visits all the places along the route that her father followed at the time, up to the spot where he was injured.

In June 2016, under the willow tree, Jenny Schoondermark and the van Beek family hold a simple memorial for the passing of Dora, Ina's mother, on June 15, 2016, in Australia. As mentioned at the beginning, the reason for this story is the note that Jenny leaves on the willow after this commemoration.

In 2016, Ina and David visit the willow tree again and conduct the interview that partly shapes this article. She tells us, among other things, that her brother will visit the monumental willow in 2017.

In 2016, Ina and David visit the willow tree again and conduct the interview that partly shapes this article. She tells us, among other things, that her brother will visit the monumental willow in 2017.

Father Jan passed away on October 17, 2000, at the Carrington Nursing Home in Camden, Australia. After his cremation, the ashes are interred at the Camden General Cemetery Cawdor Rd Camden, wall C, niche 15.



We conclude our story on Saturday, February 4, 2017. Then, by the willow, there are a few members of the Pheasant Foundation and some visitors, making a total group of about 10 interested parties.



**One of the visitors places a bouquet in the black hole and pauses for a moment.**





**Artist Impression van Dick Vos**



**Triple life insurance for our monumental willow**

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### **With thanks for your contribution and/or photo material.**

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Regional Archive Langstraat Heusden Altena Mr. Van Spronsen,

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## **Cheryl & Allan Dijkstra visits the willow that his father planted.**

Cheryl and Allan Dykstra from Australia are visiting Holland in June 2017. Allan is the brother of Ina, the one with whom an interview was held in 2016. That interview was the reason for this story about the willow, planted by their father Jan Dykstra. As previously described, Allan was born on February 2, 1955, in Arnhem and moved to Australia at the age of two. It is the third time that they are visiting Holland. Besides the National Monument Kamp Vught and the TT in Assen, this time they also visit the monument at the ferry in Sprang Capelle twice. The first time together with cousin Bert Dykstra and the second time on Wednesday, June 21, 2017, with members of the local history association. Cheryl and Allan are impressed and also grateful for the attention given by the local history association to the willow and thereby to Allan's father.



It is Wednesday morning, June 21, the longest day, with a temperature forecast of over thirty degrees. When Cheryl and Allan arrive, Koos Nieuwenhuizen is already visible from afar on the last remaining piece of dike after the "room for the river" project has been completed.

It is a beautiful morning and also impressive when memories from the past are recalled.



Koos offers Allan, on behalf of our association, two draft copies of the story about the willow. Allan gratefully accepts the draft of the story about The Willow and its planter and promises to hand a copy to Ina when he returns home to Australia, as well as to write a piece about their visit to Holland and Het Kapelsche Veer. That will eventually be included in a publication of Het Kustersluik of our association



The willow also observes the construction of the renewed monument.



7 May 2017



4 June 2017



14 June 2017



14 June 2017