

A Heartfelt Thanks....from a 'Dutch-Canadian'

May 5, 2015

Beste Allemaal,



Today is the 70th Anniversary of the Liberation of Holland. If you have been following the news, you probably realize how much love, gratitude and appreciation that the Dutch have for Canadians, for their tremendous and vital part that they played in liberating Holland and the significant sacrifices that they made in doing so. The Canadians had to fight their way across the various types of waterways that existed and through a multitude of villages, towns and cities. All of Holland was finally free on 5 May 1945 when the German army surrendered to Canadian Lieutenant-General Charles Foulkes, Commander 1st Canadian Corps. Around 7,600 Canadians gave up their lives in the fight to free the Netherlands. Holland observes Remembrance Day on 4 May each year. I have visited several of the Commonwealth graves in Holland and elsewhere where many Canadians are buried. Each of these cemeteries are kept absolutely clean and well kept and school children do their part to keep them so.

My parents experienced the whole war while living in Amsterdam, got married in 1944 and my older brother was born in March of 1945 while the northern half (including Amsterdam) was starving throughout that extremely cold and bitter winter (The Hunger Winter). Dad was involved in the resistance movement but would never talk much about it. My parents hated war and what it did to people. After the war, much rebuilding had to be done and by 1960, my parents decided to come to Canada.

We emigrated from Holland 55 years ago today, flying with KLM and landed in Montreal in the morning of 6 May, flying to Toronto later that morning, a flight/journey and experience that remains still fresh in my mind to this day. With 7 kids arriving and expecting my youngest sister in December of 1960, we were a classic immigrant family with Dad the only who spoke English, very little money at any time but we all had a very strong work ethic and managed to survive and thrive as a family. Canada was for us a land of opportunity, open spaces, where working together, families could make a go of it, and so we did. In November 1965, I proudly became a Canadian citizen and kept my Dutch heritage close to me.

I write to you all with this detail to let everyone know how the Dutch feel about Canada and Canadians, how we are very lucky to live in the country that we do and to express eternal gratitude for the Canadians that liberated my country of birth 70 years ago. No doubt, all of you probably know either through family or friends, Canadian veterans who fought in Europe and some who did not come home. It is the reason why it is so important to have a Remembrance Day. It is the reason why my family and I feel such deep gratitude to Canada. It is the reason why I am so proud to be a Canadian and to have served in the Canadian air force for 31 years. So, from my family who immigrated to Canada, and from my own family happily living in Penetanguishene, a heartfelt thank you to you, your relatives who served in the Second World War and to all people of Canada for living in one of the best countries in the world.

Hartelijke groet,

Joep

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