



## **Newsletter Relatives December 2018**

Dear relative,

At the end of 2018 I like to send you this yearly newsletter to keep you informed about the developments with regard to our submarines which were lost during World War II. It is an integral part of our solemn duty to keep alive the memory of the men who paid the highest possible price for our freedom; their lives. Your relatives and our former colleagues deserve that. The Working Group Submarines, with as its principal members the foundation Relatives Submarines 1940-1945 and the Royal Netherlands Navy, are leading this effort.

### **4 May commemoration**

During the 4<sup>th</sup> of May ceremony at the submarine monument situated at the submarine base in Den Helder, we commemorate our brothers in arms who have fallen during the Second World War. In order to anchor their memory into our present day thinking and acting, this is a most important event. Noticing that our family gathering still grows with new and so far unknown members, including a sizeable portion of young people, fills me with pride.

### **The submarine wrecks in the East Indies**

At the end of 2018 we can conclude that there have been several developments regarding the situation around the war graves. The Working Group Submarines, supported by the foundation Relatives Submarines 1940-1945 and the International Submariners Association, has formed bonds with several ministries important to the preservation and management of the war graves. For example, the interdepartmental commission regarding ship discoveries - also known as the "wreck commission" - has paid the Dutch Submarine Service a visit in order to be informed about how to manage the wrecks and how to preserve war graves in our spirit. As a result of this visit, the preservation of this very important heritage will be structurally dealt with. Also, this has been discussed and documented in the parliamentary General Consultation "Java Sea" in which the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Defence have pledged to the House of Representatives to provide insight into the extent of the number of war wrecks. This is an important requirement in order to form any kind of management. Of this you have been informed by the Commander Naval Forces on July 4, 2018.

On November 17, 2018 the departments responsible for the preservation of Cultural Heritage of the Netherlands and Indonesia have signed a letter of intent. This paves the way for an effective research into the war wrecks in – amongst others- the Java Sea in order to take efficient measures stopping

further looting of the sunken ships. Meanwhile, the locations of the wrecks of HNLMS Java, HNLMS De Ruyter and HNLMS Kortenaer – all sadly already desecrated in 2016 – are recorded in the list of protected heritage and are marked on nautical maps. Eventually this should lead to the detection and respectful management of other ships lost in Indonesian waters.

With regard to our perished submarines in Malayan waters a similar process has been started which should also lead to a similar letter of intent.

Some years ago it was announced that the wrecks of the submarines HNLMS O 16 and HNLMS K XVII have all but disappeared. The present state of HNLMS O 20 and that of HNLMS K XVI are as yet unknown, thus making an agreement regarding wreck management with Malaysia of the utmost importance.

### **The submarine wrecks in the North Sea**

The ship wrecks in the North Sea also have our full attention.

Since her discovery in 1995, the wreck of the HNLMS O 22 has not been revisited. The video footage taken at the time shows only her port side. Because she lies at a depth of 180 metres it is difficult to make further investigations. However, it is the intention of the Working Group Submarines to – on just occasion and with the aid of the Mine Warfare Flotilla - portray the situation more clearly using modern sonar techniques and camera's.

HNLMS O 13 is the last Dutch submarine unfound. During our, until now futile, search we did find and investigate British and German submarine wrecks sunken during World War I. These wrecks have been imbedded in the sand for around 100 years. The salt water and the abrasive effect of the sand result in the slow disappearance of these wrecks. But as yet these wrecks are still recognizable and testify of the severe demands of the war on sea.

Again during the past year several possible locations for HNLMS O 13 have been researched.

The past few years the Foundation “Dive the North Sea Clean” has made diving trips with the ship “Commandant Fourcault”. During these trips they have researched 13 promising possible locations for HNLMS O 13, regrettably without the desired result. However, in this way we gain more knowledge about the previously found submarine wrecks as mentioned and we have ascertained their correct identification. These locations have now been deleted from the search list.

Last November, the Polish private expedition Santi Diving went to sea on the research vessel “NEMO A” in order to locate the Polish submarine Orzel. Since several years we work closely together with this team and during their last trip they investigated some possible locations for the HNLMS O 13, but again without finding her or the Orzel. However, during this trip some 40 locations have been searched and 16 new, as yet unidentified, wrecks have been found. Also the British submarine HMS Tarpon, sunk on April 4, 1940, has been captured on sonar.

The above mentioned finds show that the seafloor still relinquishes some of her secrets and so I have good faith we will someday find HNLMS O 13.

Furthermore, our search is being relentlessly brought to the attention of other parties active on the North Sea. By attending “North Sea Days” and offshore trade shows, the search for HNLMS O 13 is being brought to the attention of outsiders. Also, this attendance leads to more publicity for the special status of the war wrecks and the necessity of careful management hereof.

### **Protection of the war wrecks**

Last May the International Community of Submariners Associations held her 55<sup>th</sup> yearly congress. The event took place in Gdansk, Poland and some members of the Dutch chapter attended. Apart from increasing cooperation, a main topic was the discussion of the "Memorandum Regarding the Desecration of War Graves at Sea". With the aid of this memorandum the topic of protection of war graves is hoped to be brought to the attention of relevant countries and consequently to be put on their political agenda. This year we hope to continue our alliance with this very sympathetic submariners community in Belgrado, and in the following years in Sweden and India.

### **Special events**

Together with the Master Chief of the Submarine Service I attended the memorial at the International Submariners Monument in Dundee on Saturday September 9, 2018. Apart from our own monument, this is the place where the crews of HNLMS O 13 and HNLMS O 22 together with their foreign colleagues of the 9th Submarine Flotilla are being remembered. In this place, it is not difficult to feel the remembrance.

Sadly, this year we also lost some special people. I would like to mention Henk Bussemaker who has vastly committed himself to the foundation Relatives Submarines 1940-1945 and the International Submariners Association especially.

### **And last but not least**

During the last few months the discovery of the last year lost Argentinian submarine ARA San Juan was very encouraging. Due to the employment and dedication of the crew of a complete and modern equipped research vessel and after a long and hard search, she was found 600 kilometres from shore and at a depth of approximately 950 metres on November 17. Fortunately the efforts proved to be successful and may help giving the bereaved some peace.

I hope to have updated you with this newsletter. If you have any questions or want to make suggestions, you can always contact me or my adjutant via the contact details mentioned in this letter. I would like to conclude by wishing you happy holidays, and I hope to meet you next year at the May 4th commemoration.



Captain Herman de Groot

Commander Netherlands Submarine Force

To provide you in the future this letter by e-mail, please would you be so kind to send us your e-mailadress. You can send it to [ADMIN.OZD@mindef.nl](mailto:ADMIN.OZD@mindef.nl).  
Thank you very much in advance.