



Newsletter Relatives December 2019

Dear relative,

At the end of 2019 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 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 its principal members the Foundation Relatives Submarines 1940-1945 and the Royal Netherlands Navy, are leading this effort.

4 May commemoration

As usual on May 4th, during a ceremony at the Submarine Memorial at our submarine base in Den Helder, we commemorated our brothers in arms who fell during the Second World War. We have held these commemorations since 1948 and also this year many gathered to attend in Den Helder. It is good to notice the attendance to this commemoration is ever growing. We are approaching an important milestone. Next year we will commemorate the outbreak of the war 80 years ago and the liberation of the Netherlands 75 years ago. It is important to me that we anchor their memory into our present day thinking and acting, certainly with this milestone approaching.

The submarine wrecks in the East Indies

In June a REMUS team from the Netherlands Navy Diving Group were part of an expedition to the submarine wrecks in the South China Sea. REMUS is a small unmanned submarine with sensors to detect objects on the seabed. This expedition was led by the Dutch Governmental Agency for the preservation of Cultural Heritage with involvement of the ministries of Foreign Affairs, Culture and Science and the ministry of Defence. Unfortunately it has been established that the wrecks of HNLMS O 16 en K XVII have disappeared almost completely. However it was good that we were able to launch this expedition and provide clarity about these wrecks. It also meant that we forged better ties with the governments of Indonesia and Malaysia. Close cooperation is the only way forward to better preserve these important heritage items.

It was very apparent to everybody involved that these searches are close to your heart when we hosted a special information day on October 12th on this expedition and the searches in the Java Sea. I was very pleased to meet a lot of you there and share the information we gathered with you.

As we speak there are new deliberations going on to also get clarity on the wrecks of K XVI and O 20.

The submarine wrecks in the North Sea

The search for O 13 is still ongoing. On top of the ongoing searches of archives and databases, there have been two expeditions at sea, to help solve this puzzle. From 5 till 12 July there has been an expedition of "Dive the North Sea Clean". These expeditions are normally all about cleaning the North Sea of plastics and remove nets and other items from wrecks. This year however it was all about doing this whilst searching for O 13. On 75 possible sites 18 Wrecks were discovered of which one proved to be a world war I German submarine wreck. Other wrecks turned out to be mostly merchant or fishing vessels.

Several weeks later a Polish expedition organised by Santi went to sea from Thyboron, Denmark, in search for the Polish submarine Orzel. They also made use of the search points developed for O 13. As you may be aware we already for several years work side by side with the Santi team to find O13 and Orzel, both lost in the same general area in the North Sea. The Santi expedition surveyed 183 positions, which resulted in 83 wrecks. And although no submarine wrecks were found this does mean that 183 possible locations can be deleted from the search list. This could be done because DDNZZS also did dive on a great number of wrecks whereas Santi could predominantly focus on sonar survey of the locations.

Another positive note on these expeditions is the broader awareness by the general public that these searches are ongoing. This is fortified by media attention on the discovery of HMS Urge near Malta led by the son of her commanding officer, or USS Greyback which was found after 77 years as a result of a US civil initiative called "the lost 52" to discover the fate of these 52 submariners who went down with her. Very special was the find of the French submarine Minerve, 51 years after she disappeared in the Mediterranean Sea off Toulon, France. She went missing with 52 crew on January 27 1968 during an exercise, a short while after leaving her home port of Toulon. Finding her finally brought solace to the relatives and colleagues after all these years. It is of note that these searches follow the same pattern and methods we also use to search for O 13.

Protection of the war wrecks

In the international arena we keep pushing for legislation to protect and preserve the wreck sites. This effort is also brought forward by Netherlands Branch of in the International Community of Submariners Associations. They organise yearly conferences having this issue prominently on the agenda. Their efforts often reach the highest levels of government.

Monuments

During the information day on October 12th about the disappeared wrecks in the Far East the desire was expressed to also set up a commemoration site outside the naval base. This will be investigated as part of the renovation plans of the Dutch Navy Museum. The plans would include a special spot to tell the story of the bravery beneath the waves. For this purpose we are looking for pictures, stories and artefacts you may be willing to share with the museum to tell "their" story.

Also in Scotland, in Dundee at the Camperdown Dock, where many Dutch submarines operated from during the war, plans are being made to improve the area around the International Submarine Memorial and share the background information with the broader public. Every year on the second

Saturday in September the lost boats from Dundee are commemorated here. This year the ceremony was attended by Ron Rietveld and Jouke Spoelstra.

There is an initiative in Australia to build a submarine heritage area to commemorate the allied submarines fighting from Fremantle during the war. Still little is known that eleven Dutch boats operated from this port in the period 1943-1945.

We will support both the Scottish and Australian initiatives where and when we can.

In October I paid my respects at the in 1991 by the Netherlands Ex-Servicemen's Association of Australia founded monument commemorating the Dutch war effort as part of the Fremantle War-Memorial on Monument Hill in this city.

And last but not least

The coming year we will continue to host and be present at activities that keep the memory of your relatives and our predecessors alive. We will honour their sacrifice and make sure we will never forget.

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 Submarines



Captain (RNLN) H.M.T. (Herman) de Groot

To provide you in the future this letter by e-mail, please would you be so kind to send us your e-mail address. For any questions as well, you can send it to ADMIN.OZD@mindef.nl. Thank you very much in advance.

