



Onderzeedienst

Den Helder, December 13th, 2016

Subject: War Graves Dutch Submarines WWII

Dear relative,

With this newsletter I would like to provide you again with as clear as possible a picture of relevant developments on the Dutch submarines that were sunk doing battle in the Second World War. I suspect that some of the information in this letter you may already know from conversations with others or from publications in the media.

Recent developments.

In 2017 appropriate attention will be given to the 75th anniversary of the military operations of our naval units in the Asian combat theatre, which culminated in the Battle of the Java Sea. Because of the prominent and heroic role of our submarines in the South China Sea against the Japanese invasion fleet, the Foundation Relatives Submarines 1940-1945 (SNO) is involved in the preparations for this commemoration. The commemoration service will be conducted under the auspices of the Karel Doorman Fund (KDF) and the Royal Netherlands Navy and will be held on February 27th, 2017 in the "Kloosterkerk" church in The Hague. In case you would like to be present you can register by email at: kabinet.czsk@mindef.nl forwarding each individual person's full name, residential address, email address, and when applicable the name of the submarine on which your relative served.

As part of the commemoration and under the auspices of the KDF, a book (in Dutch) will be published late January 2017 titled: *De Javazee-campagne na 75 jaar. Sporen van de strijd van de Koninklijke Marine tegen Japan, december 1941 – maart 1942*¹. Please note that this book can be pre-ordered.

¹ Translated: *The Java Sea campaign after 75 years. Traces of the battle of the Royal Netherlands Navy against Japan, December 1941 - March 1942*

In this book a chapter has been dedicated to the endeavours of some of "our" relatives to locate the Dutch submarines lost in battle. These are, as you know the O 16, K XVII, O 20 and K XVI. The last boat was discovered on October 4th, 2011 by a Norwegian-Australian diving team aboard the motor vessel MV Empress.

On November 1st 2016 this same motor vessel MV Empress left the port of Bali under Dutch leadership and with an international diving team embarked. The aim of the trip was to further investigate the wrecks of HNLMS De Ruyter, HNLMS Java and HNLMS Kortenaer, three Dutch ships which have been sunk in the Battle of the Java Sea. During preparations for this expedition both KDF and SNO have been cooperating closely. The result of the trip was not only very disappointing but above all shocking and upsetting: both wrecks of the De Ruyter and Java have disappeared and only some of the Kortenaer wreckage remains. Governments of both The Netherlands and Indonesia have announced a joint investigation into these events.

The Commander Netherlands Navy Lieutenant-general Royal Marines Rob Verkerk was abhorred by the findings: "The loss of our war graves at sea has deeply affected me both as a person and as a military man. These resting places should be treated with respect. Not only for the relatives, but above all to pay respect to those who brought the ultimate sacrifice. I find it appalling that this severe form of desecration of these war graves took place. And hope that the investigation will show what has happened to the ships. My thoughts are with the survivors and their relatives of the Battle of the Java Sea." Obviously, he means all the relatives of the entire Java Sea campaign.

Developments on the Netherlands submarine wrecks.

In my newsletter of December 2015, I wrote the following about the wrecks of O 16 and K XVII: "in 2014 a diving team commissioned by the SNO shot film and photo footage taken from both wrecks. As previously indicated to you (Newsletter December 2014) both wrecks showed apart from signs of aging also damage by salvage attempts and are therefore severely damaged." No information is available on the status of the other two boats in Asian waters, ie. O 20 and K XVI.

It is therefore the intention of the SNO to urge the Dutch Government through the appropriate channels to investigate the status of all four submarine war graves in the Asian waters. The wrecks of our sunken submarines are located in international waters. The most relevant state in that region is Malaysia. The wreckage of the O 22 on the other hand is located in the North Sea at great depth which safeguards it against pillage or salvage.

The Royal Netherlands Navy, the KDF and the SNO continue to work to achieve equal status and protection for war graves at sea similar to that for war graves on land. However, this will take time and enforcement of this status is complex. Moreover internationally virtually none of this has been regulated. The ultimate goal is to give all "our" naval wrecks the special status they deserve i.e. that of a war grave. Currently we are in discussion with several entities amongst which The Netherlands War Graves Foundation (Oorlogsgravenstichting).

Other events and commemorations.

On May 4th, like every year, we, our relatives and colleagues have commemorated the fallen submariners at the "Onderzeedienstmonument" on Jetty 19 in Den Helder. Again it was a memorable event.

That day, May 4th, he was still among us, but on July 27th, 2016, the patron of Foundation Relatives Submarines 1940-1945, His Excellency P.J.S. (Piet) de Jong, deceased at 101 years of age. Active serving and former Submarine Service personnel and the SNO both placed obituaries in Dutch national newspapers recalling his commitment and friendship.

On September 10th, I have, together with my Chef d'Equipage WO William Hersbach and Katja Boonstra-Blom and her husband Ben (representing SNO and International Submariners' Association (ISA)) attended the annual commemoration service held at the Submarine Monument in Dundee. On behalf of the Submarine Service, the SNO, ISA NL and the Dutch Submariners Association we have laid flowers and wreaths. It was a beautiful ceremony which drew a lot of attention. The Dundee Submarine Monument was built in 2009 and is dedicated to the lost crews of British, Dutch, Norwegian and Russian submarines which operated from Dundee during WWII. At the annual commemoration the Dutch Relatives and the Submarine Service is usually represented by Mr. Ron Rietveld (Secretary of the West of Scotland Branch Submariners Association). He also was present this year.

On September 21st, I have paid my respects to our lost colleagues in Fremantle (Australia) at the monument on Monument Hill, together with my colleagues from the Submarine Services of the USA (Rear Admiral Roegge), Australia (Commodore Scott), Great Britain (Commander Rich) and Japan (Rear Admiral Saito). It was a short ceremony lead by the "padre" of the Australian Submarine Service. After his prayers we laid our separate wreaths. Following this ceremony, I also paid my respects together with Teacher SMCC Commander Rouwhorst at the Dutch Submarine Monument also located at "Monument Hill." Our participation in the Asia Pacific Submarine Conference offered an excellent opportunity to commemorate our comrades.

On November 25th, in the Tradition Room of the Submarine Service, the authors Henk Bussemaker and Janet van Klink presented the first copy of their book, "De Tegenaanval"² to the Commander Netherlands Navy Lieutenant-general Royal Marines Rob Verkerk. The book is a biography of Anton Bussemaker, commanding officer of the O 16, father of Henk. Janet's great-uncle was the Chief Engineer of the O 16. On that occasion, Minister for Education, Culture and Science Jet Bussemaker, granddaughter of Anton and daughter of Henk, held a warm and compassionate speech on the emotions of the relatives after the war. The book (in Dutch) is available via internet and in national bookstores.

The Search for O 13 "Still on patrol"

(missing since June 12th, 1940) The search continues!

In 2015 we were given a handwritten patrol report and a navigation log, written by the commanding officer of the Polish submarine Wilk. The Wilk claims to have sunk another

² Translated: The Counter Attack

submarine at about the same time and place of the disappearance of the O 13. This report provides us with the most specific reference to the O 13 to date. It could indicate that its followed course leads to a search area roughly 30 Nautical miles (55 kilometers) North of our current estimated position. There is evidence of at least one, and possibly more submarine wrecks in that area. All these should be searched and identified over the coming years. Firstly however, before we can go to sea again, a lot of research of archives is necessary, because otherwise the search area remains simply too large and the probability of success will correspondingly be too small.

Meanwhile, the investigation into other possibilities is continuing. Over the past year and with support of various North Sea (Civilian) diving teams eight possible submarine wreck sites have been investigated. When possible, Royal Netherlands Navy units are investigating wreck locations stated on the "searchlist". They have, among other things, investigated three sites which were designated by the earlier expedition held in 2012 as "possible submarine." Unfortunately, no submarine wrecks were discovered.

As Workgroup Submarines we have assisted in the identification of the British First World War submarine HMS E-5, which sank with 30 crew members on March 7, 1916 North of the island of Schiermonnikoog. It proved to be a difficult operation because this wreck, together with two other to be investigated wrecks, is located in a busy shipping lane. With the help of the Netherlands Coast Guard and with consent of the National Cultural Heritage Council (RCE) the Starfish diving team from Lauwersoog could safely conduct their task leading to the identification of HMS E-5. They also succeeded in shooting video footage of the previously found submarine HMS E-26. Several relatives of the HMS E-5 crew have showed their gratitude to the Starfish diving team for their efforts to put this submarine wreck on the map.

On December 14th I will hand over my position as Commander Netherlands Submarine Service to Captain H.M.T. (Herman) de Groot. It has been a honour for me to represent your interests.

In conclusion, I would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and I hope that my successor will be able to meet many of you at the Memorial Service on May 4th next year.

With high regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Ammerlaan', written over a large, faint, stylized signature or watermark.

Hugo L.J. Ammerlaan
Captain (Navy)
Commander Submarine Service Netherlands