



Onderzeedienst

Den Helder, December 19th, 2017

Subject: War Graves Dutch Submarines WWII.

Dear relative,

By means of this yearly newsletter on the developments with regards to our submarines that were lost during World War II I would like to keep you informed. In my opinion it is our solemn duty to keep the memory of your relatives and our former colleagues -who paid the highest possible price for our freedom; their lives- alive. The working group submarines, with its principal members the foundation Relatives Submarines 1940-1945 and the Royal Netherlands Navy, are providing direction and guidance regarding this process.

#### **4 May commemoration**

On the 4th of May, during a ceremony at the submarine monument at the submarine base in Den Helder we commemorated our brothers in arms who have fallen 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 amount of young people attending is growing yearly.

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

During 2017 there have been several developments on the desecration of our war graves at sea.

As a result of last year's consternation concerning the almost complete disappearance of the wrecks of the Battle of Java Sea (HNLMS De Ruyter, HNLMS Java and HNLMS Kortenaer), steps have been taken to gain insight into the state of the other wrecks in the Java Sea and in the South China Sea. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Defence work closely together on this important issue. First of all, an inventory was made of the shipwrecks and their locations, as the basis for establishing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the coastal states in whose area

the wrecks are located. An MOU has already been signed with Indonesia; the talks with Malaysia for a comparable MOU are still ongoing.

It is hoped that concrete agreements can be reached with both countries in the coming year so that the mutual heritage managers can jointly implement their desired policy. With regard to the submarines this is all the more important because all our submarines are in the waters of Malaysia, to be precise in the Exclusive Economic Zone of that country.

A few years ago it was already announced that the wrecks of the Submarines HNLMS O16 and HNLMS K XVII have almost disappeared. The state of both HNLMS O20 and K XVI is uncertain.

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

The wrecks resulting from World War II in the North Sea also have our attention.

Since her discovery in 1995, the wreck of HNLMS O22 has not been visited again. The video images of the wreck which we possess date from her discovery during which only her port side was filmed. Since the boat is at a depth of 180 meters, research is not straightforward. Yet the working group submarines wants to try to research the wreck with modern sonar and cameras in order to definitively determine the cause of the boat's demise.

HNLMS O13 is the last Dutch boat that has not yet been found. During our search for O13 -so far in vain - British and German submarine wrecks have been found and investigated. These are mainly wrecks from the First World War. They have been lying on the seabed for 100 years and are sometimes buried deep in the sand. The wrecks are slowly but surely disappearing due to the salt water and the abrasive action of the sand. Yet they are still recognizable and are true monuments of the toll that the war at sea has demanded.

In the past year several possible locations for HNLMS O13 have been examined.

The ship Commandant Fourcault, in recent years used for diving trips to wrecks on the North Sea by the Foundation "Dive the North Sea Clean", has explored a number of interesting locations for HNLMS O13 and has also conducted dives on several submarine wrecks. Unfortunately no trace of HNLMS O13 was found. We did however gather more knowledge about the submarine wrecks and it verified the conduct of correct identification. Therefore these locations have been removed from the search list.

In the months from June to October the hydrographic survey vessel HNLMS Snellius mapped out a considerable portion of the Dutch part of the Continental Shelf while conducting survey work on the North Sea, and it also examined various possible "O13" locations. At five locations in the middle part of the North Sea, there was no trace of a submarine wreck found, which meant that these locations could be discarded. The search points located close to the Norwegian coast could unfortunately not be investigated because of the very deep water and the prevailing bad weather conditions. We will try to examine these locations during subsequent journeys of hydrographic survey vessels or Minehunters.

Finally, in June, a Polish private expedition from Santi Diving went searching for the Polish submarine ORP Orzel. We have been working closely together with this team for several years and our Polish colleagues have during this expedition examined a number of possible locations for HNLMS O13 . Unfortunately, no trace of our last boat or of the Orzel was found. However, the expedition did find the British submarine HMS Narwhal, lost in December 1940, on one of the examined locations! We have reported this find to the British authorities. They may follow this up with further research.

Recently, the minehunter HNLMS Makkum found a submarine wreck by accident during an exercise of the coast from Normandy. After investigation, it turned out to be the German U-Boot SMS UC-69, which foundered on December 6, 1917 as a result of a collision with the German submarine SMS-U-96.

From the above findings it appears that the seabed can still reveal its secrets, and we therefore conclude there is still a good chance of finding HNLMS O13.

### **Protection of War Wrecks**

The International Community of Submariners Associations held its 54th annual conference in May. This time the event took place in St. Petersburg. A few members of the Dutch chapter, which was established some years ago, were also present. In addition to tightening the ties of friendship, the "Memorandum Regarding the Desecration of War Graves at Sea", which was drawn up a few years ago, was also up for discussion. This memorandum seeks to ensure that the protection of war wrecks is placed on the political agenda of countries. Although a number of important countries such as the United States and Russia have already pledged their support, many countries remain reluctant. This means that there is still a great deal of work to be done in order to secure international protection.

As indicated at the beginning of this newsletter, the war wrecks are constantly brought to the attention of the ministries by members of the Working Group Submarines. The talks with the officials responsible give hope for setting up effective management of these graves at sea. We hope that in the future activities of the Coastal States on the North Sea will ensure the careful and respectful treatment of the war wrecks.

### **Special events**

Although not related to finding the O-13 or the protection of the Dutch submarine wrecks, I do not want to withhold you two special events.

In September, together with the Chef d'Equipage of the Submarine Service, I visited Captain (retired) Ruud van Wely who celebrated his 100th birthday on September 13. Taking his age into account I planned for just an hour-long visit, but reluctantly left him after four hours. Those four hours were completely filled with his experiences of the Second World War in both the East Indies and in Europe when he served on both ships and submarines. He ended the war as the executive officer on O24 under command of the late Piet de Jong.

In October I also visited lieutenant commander (retired) Aart Hopman in Canberra, Australia. Aart turned a 100 years of age on October 23 and throughout the World War II he served on K-XV.

I can tell you that the insights of both gentlemen have made a deep impression. I got a glimpse of what it must have been like to have served on submarines under war conditions. It has certainly strengthened me to keep doing everything possible to find the O13 and to keep the memory of all who have fallen serving in the Submarine Service alive.

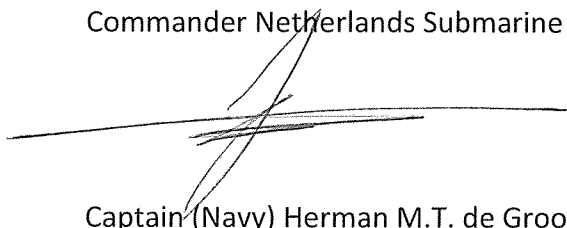
Sadly I also need to inform you on the passing away of Hans Besançon, the son of the commanding officer of K XVII. We will always remember Hans as the stimulating power behind the searches for the wrecks of our submarines which were lost during the war. We can never thank him enough for all his efforts.

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

The disappearance of the Argentinian submarine San Juan shows once again how fragile the balance for a small boat under the surface is. War or no war, the main battle of a submarine is always the battle of its crew against the elements. That too is a battle that is sometimes hard-won. Many resources are being used to trace the San Juan, which has already been declared lost by the Argentine government. Here it also appears that the seabed, with the wrecks that have been there for a long time, is often not detailed enough mapped out. While the search forces find wrecks, they must be investigated individually to determine whether this is the San Juan. We hope for the families, friends and colleagues that they can be found quickly.

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.

Commander Netherlands Submarine Service

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'H.M.T. de Groot', written over a horizontal line.

Captain (Navy) Herman M.T. de Groot