

## **Ex ARNHEM WHISPERS 2 CER Participates in Commemorative Events of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Op BERLIN**

From September 14-23, fourteen members of 2 CER had the opportunity to participate in Ex ARNHEM WHISPERS, a special, educational trip funded by the Neder Rijn League. The purpose of the visit was primarily to participate in commemorative events of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Op BERLIN. The secondary purposes included battlefield tours and professional development opportunities with the Dutch engineers. Below are two reflections, one from the youngest sapper, Sapper Camilleri, and the other from the padre, Capt Schweyer whose grandfather helped liberate Arnhem as a sapper in 13<sup>th</sup> Field Company in 1945.

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### **Reflections of Sapper Camilleri.**

Being able to participate in ‘Ex ARNHEM WHISPERS’ as the youngest sapper and having the opportunity to witness the profound beauty that the country and people of the Netherlands had to offer, as well as the experiences shared there, whether through battlefield tours, visiting Canadian war cemeteries or taking part in various events celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ‘Operation MARKET GARDEN’, these are moments in my life that I will cherish forever. I had found myself on more than one occasion completely taken back by the sheer amount of thankfulness and gratitude shown by the Dutch people towards their Polish, American, British, and Canadian liberators even 75 years later.

Seeing the outpouring of support and gratefulness was like nothing I had ever seen before. It is hard to explain sometimes the emotions felt when someone comes up to you and thanks you for liberating them so many years ago and it especially hits home when they begin to explain their personal stories of what they had to endure during those dark times and what it meant to them and their families to finally be freed from their oppressors. Walking through the rows of the gravestones of allied soldiers at the war cemeteries and reading the quotes engraved on the headstones of each soldier left by family, friends and comrades, gave me a sliver of insight into what exactly these young men and women sacrificed and the loved ones they left behind. In order to bring peace and freedom to those they didn’t even know, they did so with the utmost courage and tenacity.

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### **Reflections of The Padre, Capt Schweyer**

As the padre of 2 CER, I found this trip to be both humbling and eye-opening. I had the opportunity to be part of 2 memorial services, including the memorial for LCpl Antonio Barbaro, and it is always humbling to honour and remember the fallen. It is humbling to view the numerous tombstones, a visible reminder of so many young soldiers who gave the ultimate sacrifice to bring freedom and liberation to the Dutch people from their oppressors.

Yet the most impactful portion of the trip for me was the day we spent on the battle field tour of Op BERLIN. It is one thing to see the large display at 2 CER in the Neder Rijn building, and

altogether another thing to be in the location of the operation. To see the condensed area and the short width of the Neder Rijn, it is amazing to me that any British Airborne were rescued that fateful night. And yet under the barrage of machine gun fire, mortar rounds and artillery, the brave engineers of 23 Field Company were able to rescue 2400 soldiers in the midst of chaos.

While we were reflecting on the events of that night, very unexpectedly a 97 year old airborne veteran was brought down to the river crossing. It was surreal to listen to him remember flashback memories of that night and to remember the rescue that occurred, even though he was not able to be rescued and had to surrender to the enemy. In silence we gathered around him to listen to him recount those events. We were emotionally impacted as we heard first-hand what it was like that night. I was moved listening to him as I thought of my grandfather, a sapper with 13 Field Company who later liberated Arnhem in the late spring of 1945. War is chaos but this trip was a reminder to me of the bravery and courage of a few good men and women who can make all the difference at the right time and the right place.

#### Possible Pictures:



While visiting the crossing site of Op BERLIN, Sandy Courtman, 97, one of the British Airborne, made an unexpected visit. We were honored to meet him. He was scheduled to participate in the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary jump.



Outside the church in Oosterbeek, near the crossing point.



At the Engineer Memorial with the widow of Henk Duinhoven (initiator of the monument), Marion Duinhoven and Connie Bateman, the widow of the infanteer who is quoted with “whispers and shadows.”



During our time in Europe we saw over 15,000 tombstones. These ones are at the cemetery in Groesbeek



Burying the ashes of Don Somerville at the crossing point on the north side of the Neder Rijn.



2 CER at the British Airborne memorial near Oosterbeek.

