



VICTORY IN EUROPE DAY

MAY 8 1945 ★ 2020

Chong: 'To this day the Dutch have never forgotten' the sacrifices of Canadians

By Chris Daponte

FERGUS - One of Michael Chong's earliest childhood memories is his late mother stressing the importance of remembering the sacrifices of Canadian soldiers who liberated the Netherlands.

"She drilled it into out heads at a very young age," said Chong, recalling one specific pre-kindergarten trip to the Guelph cenotaph.

The Wellington-Halton Hills MP has two close connections to the Liberation, the 75th anniversary of which is officially celebrated on May 5.

"It's a particularly important moment because it was a very difficult time under Nazi occupation," said Chong, whose late birth mother was born about a month after the May 1945 liberation in the town of Drachten, in the province of Friesland.

His "second mother" (to whom his father was remarried) was a young girl during the war, living in the town of Katwijk aan Zee, in the province of South Holland.

Both were liberated by Canadian soldiers.

"This is something for which they - we as a family - are eternally grateful," Chong told the *Advertiser*.

A 'horrific' five years

The Liberation of the Netherlands, while officially celebrated in North America on May 5, took place in stages between September 1944 and May 1945.

The Liberation is often celebrated simultaneously with Victory in Europe (VE) Day, officially recognized on May 8, and regarded as the culmination of the Second World War.

It ended five years of Nazi occupation, which had begun in May 1940.

"It was a horrific time ... so when the Canadians came ... it was a joyous and momentous occasion," said Chong.

The liberation was particularly



Dutch civilians and Canadian Army troops celebrate the Liberation on May 7, 1945 in Utrecht, Netherlands.

(Credit: Alexander M. Stirton/Canada. Dept. of National Defence/Library and Archives Canada/PA-134377)



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- MICHAEL CHONG

timely as it followed the "hunger winter" of 1944-45, which was characterized by a severe shortage of food and fuel.

The road to the Netherlands

Following the Battle of Normandy (June 6 to Aug. 25, 1944), Canadian soldiers pushed east rapidly through France and Belgium.

The First Canadian Army played a leading role in opening Belgium and the Netherlands' Scheldt estuary (tidal river), gateway to the port of Antwerp, in the fall of 1944.

Meanwhile, Dutch and Allied officials had hoped that the northern part of the country would be liberated after the British/American-

led Operation Market Garden in September 1944.

But the operation failed and for months the country was divided into an occupied northern half and a largely liberated southern half, split by the Rhine River.

Following the conclusion of the Battle of the Scheldt in November

1944, winter brought a period of reduced fighting in anticipation of the push over the Rhine in the new year.

After German forces took control of the railway network and cut off food and fuel transports to the north, Allied troops air-dropped food to the Dutch people, but the hunger winter lasted until the spring Liberation, resulting in the death of about 20,000 civilians.

Throughout WWII, over 230,000 Dutch civilians died, representing about 3% of the overall population, Chong noted.

When the Allied offensives began in 1945, the First Canadian Army helped liberate the northern Netherlands until the German Army surrendered on May 5. Germany officially signed the surrender on May 7 and it came into effect the following day.

The First Canadian Army ranged in size from approximately 105,000 to 175,000 Canadian soldiers, of which more than 7,600 died in the nine-month campaign to liberate the Netherlands.

They are buried in various cemeteries in Belgium, Netherlands and Germany, with some buried in the Netherlands countryside.

"To this day, the Dutch have never forgotten that sacrifice," said Chong.

After the war

Many eternally grateful residents of the Netherlands immigrated to Canada following the war and there remains large pockets of their descendants throughout Wellington County.

Chong noted a lot of soldiers from the Wellington County area were involved in the WWII liberation. Sadly, few of those men are still alive.

"It's an amazing thing how our two countries are connected in a very personal and intimate way," he said.

- *With files from Veterans Affairs Canada*

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"Lest we forget"

Fergus Legion member shares thoughts on anniversary of Liberation of the Netherlands

By Dick Haas

FERGUS - We remember the sacrifices that Canadians made in conflicts that we, as a nation, participated in.

The official Remembrance Day traditionally is Nov. 11, the armistice signing at the end of the First World War.

The leader in our remembrances is Veterans Affairs Canada, assisted by 1,350 Legion Branches in Canada with close to 260,000 members. They connect us to our past, our present and our future.

Legion members care deeply about supporting the men and women who serve and have served this country, and strive to make a difference.

The Legion's Veterans Services Network serves all veterans, members of the Canadian Armed Forces, the RCMP and their families

- providing support free of charge.

However, it is not only Canadians who remember liberations at the end of the Second World War.

This is the story of how people in The Netherlands remember the efforts leading to the Liberation of my birth country and the signing of the peace agreement on May 5, 1945.

But first, let's look at some statistics.

About 175,000 Canadian soldiers took part in WWII, liberating The Netherlands (also called Holland after the two oldest provinces: North Holland - with Amsterdam, and South Holland with Rotterdam and The Hague). More than 7,600 soldiers died in that nine-month campaign.

Buried in the Netherlands, in six separate cemeteries, are 2,338 Canadian soldiers.



DICK HAAS

The Netherlands is really a small country between Germany and the North Sea. It is 2.5 times the size of Lake Ontario. Its biggest feature is the Rhine River (think of the war movie *A Bridge Too Far*). In wartimes, crossing a river is always a major undertaking.

The war in Holland started on May 10, 1940 when we were invaded by the German army. Largely outnumbered

and out-gunned, the government surrendered on May 14, after the centre of Rotterdam was bombed, with 900 deaths and 85,000 now homeless. Suffering started almost immediately.

The then Queen "Wilhelmina" had "escaped" to London, with her family, prior to the German invasion. She kept contact with her population from "Radio London," which was listened to in secret with hidden radios by my father and others. Those broadcasts kept everyone informed about war events.

Later the crown princess Juliana, heir to the Dutch throne, found sanctuary in Ottawa. There, in the Ottawa Civic Hospital was born princess Margriet on Jan. 19, 1943. To maintain the newborn's Dutch citizenship, the Canadian government changed the maternity suite to "extraterritorial!"

I was born in Eindhoven in the south of Holland in August 1943. We were liberated by Canadian troops on Sept. 18, 1944.

When the troops got "stuck" at the Rhine River,

as I was told, many soldiers were housed by Dutch citizens. As an infant, having suffered for lack of adequate food, I was given chocolate that the soldiers had. I am still a chocoholic!

Our parents moved to Amsterdam in 1947. Amsterdam, in 1940 had about 800,000 inhabitants, with a Jewish population of almost 10%. Few of those survived, dying in German concentration camps.

One of those was Anne Frank, who wrote the now famous *The Diary of a Young Girl*, also known as *The Diary of Anne Frank*. This book has been translated into 70 languages and made into movies.

Our apartment was two blocks away from where Anne Frank had lived, prior to her hiding. Around the corner was a KG and elementary school that Anne Frank had attended. It is now called the "Anne Frank" Montessori school. The principal, who also was my teacher, had been Anne's teacher.

Life is full of "coincidences." Both this principal and my grandfather had studied with Maria Montessori for Maria had moved to Holland and died there in 1952. Montessori schools in Amsterdam are not private

but part of the regular school boards.

Yes, I learned as a child a lot about the German occupation in Holland and its subsequent liberation by heroic Canadian soldiers.

Celebrations in the Netherlands are two-fold:

- Memorial day on May 4, which I always attended at the National Cenotaph in downtown Amsterdam; and

- Liberation celebrations are on May 5.

Many tours have been arranged for Canadian veterans to go back and relive their war experiences with the extensive thanksgiving of the whole country.

Those match the jubilation the soldiers received as they liberated town after town and conquered bridge after bridge in this water and canal strewn country.

School children, still to this day, look after the maintenance of Canadian soldiers' graves.

The Dutch will never forget the sacrifices that were made for their liberation. Neither do I. It's also one of the reasons I volunteer at my local Legion in Canada.

Remembrances and thanksgivings are in Dutch minds forever.

Dick Haas is treasurer of the Fergus Legion Branch 275.

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Mapleton pushes Tulip Festival to 2021

Organizers to host '75+1 anniversary' of Liberation of the Netherlands next year

By Jaime Myslik

DRAYTON – The COVID-19 pandemic may be forcing the cancellation of a ton of local events, but it hasn't diminished the importance of recognizing significant historical milestones.

Significant dates this week include the 75th anniversary of the Liberation of the Netherlands on May 5, and the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day on May 8.

The Drayton Rotary Club and members of Mapleton's Dutch community had planned a May 9 Tulip Festival to commemorate the anniversaries, but due to the pandemic, the festival has been rescheduled to May 8, 2021.

"We're sad that we couldn't celebrate and have this special time ... but at the end of the day, it's just giving us an extra year to make this even better and more special," said Rotarian Lorrie Spaling.

She explained the festival is important "because there are so many Dutch immigrants here in Drayton and it's a large Dutch population."

The goal was to make the festival a day for family.

"Just a day of coming out and celebrating this and you don't have to be Dutch descent, that's for sure, because I'm not and I just think it's so important that we embrace part of the Canadian and the Dutch ... history," Spaling said.

"And that also explains to a lot of people why the tulips are such a big deal.

"I just think so often we just take everything for granted and it's nice for the younger ... people of Dutch origin ... [to] learn more about why their parents chose Canada and that kind of stuff."

The anniversary is especially important for Mapleton councillor Marlene Ottens, whose parents were teenagers in the province of Drenthe, Netherlands during the Second World War.

"Commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Liberation of the Netherlands is important because many of the people with first-hand knowledge and experience of that time are no longer with us," she stated in an email to the *Advertiser*.

"As time moves on, historical events can become distant memories or fodder for re-enactments, rather than the important catalysts of change that they actually were.

"It boils down to this: if the Netherlands hadn't been liberated, I probably wouldn't be here."

She said her mother, Grace Zoer (nee Bos), often saw soldiers go by the family farm. She was nine years old when the war began. Some of the teenage boys on neighbouring farms went into hiding because the Germans would take young Dutch men to work in their factories, as most German men were in the army.

"One of her neighbour families went into hiding, and my mom's family went to their house occasionally to remove valuables for safe-keeping," Ottens said.

"Sometimes the Germans would randomly burn down a house while looking for someone, so my mom's family wanted to save what they could for their neighbours.

"That neighbour's house wasn't burned, and that family returned safely after the war was over."

in the city and the very cold winter. People in the Netherlands would burn whatever they could to stay warm – doors, furniture and even floorboards.

"There was very little food and city people would walk for hours to the farmers and offer valuables in exchange

what few supplies they had," Ottens said.

German soldiers also passed through and took food. Ottens remembered hearing one story about a soldier coming to her mother's house and grabbing two freshly baked loaves of bread.

"My grandmother

this." Grace's family saw the first Canadian tank on April 12, 1945.

"They heard the Allies were winning, but out in the country, it took a bit longer to see evidence," Ottens said. "Suddenly dozens of Canadian tanks and hundreds of Canadian soldiers were present."

"People emerged from their homes, cheering with relief."

The Dutch citizens who were hiding in barns, basements or secret rooms also came out.

"The soldiers handed out chocolate bars and cigarettes – great treats after all this time," Ottens said. "They also handed out new things like canned corned beef and Cheez Whiz and, best of all, white bread."

The Netherlands was officially liberated on May 5, 1945. Grace was 15. She and Hank met a few years later and were married when they were 22 and 24 respectively.

"Multiply that experience by the thousands, and you can see the impact," Ottens said.

"It's especially important to commemorate [the 75th anniversary] here, in Canada, because Canadian soldiers were the ones who liberated the Dutch.

"That's why so many Dutch people chose to emigrate to Canada in the post-war years; because they had such a fondness for this country due to the liberation."

Ottens' parents moved to Canada a month after they were married.

"That's why so many Dutch people chose to emigrate to Canada in the post-war years; because they had such a fondness for this country due to the liberation."

- MARLENE OTTENS



HANK AND GRACE ZOER

Ottens' late father, Hank Zoer, told her his family filled a tin with coins and jewelry and buried it in the stable.

"His father showed him where it was hidden 'just in case,'" Ottens said.

Her mother's family also hid food and winter clothes and buried papers in a field.

Ottens said the final year of the war was the hardest because of food shortages

for food," she explained. "Nobody had much to spare, but the city people always managed to barter for something.

"It was a challenge, however, to protect it from the enemy soldiers on their long walk back. Sometimes their carts had false bottoms."

Some families even took in children "even though it was a big sacrifice to share

snatched one back, angrily, and said, 'We have to eat too,'" Ottens said.

"He could have shot her right there, but didn't."

In April 1945 two SS soldiers in Nazi uniforms stayed at Grace's house for five days.

"They took over a bedroom and ate dinner with the family," Ottens said. "The family had little choice in

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May 8, 2020 marks the 75th anniversary of VE Day (Victory in Europe)

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Michael Chong
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Member of Parliament,
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2nd Chance ready to help job seekers

By Joanne Shuttleworth

FERGUS - It may not be time to advance a career, but it's a good time to get ready for finding a job.

Michelle Dally, program manager at 2nd Chance Employment Counselling, said in an interview that services are still operating; it's just in a virtual way these days.

"We have lots of over-the-phone conversations, emails, virtual workshops and meetings," Dally said. "And we are still supporting employers with job postings."

The agency has started a YouTube channel where they offer their workshops.

Dally said there are jobs in the service industry and manufacturers who have changed their operations for COVID-19.

This week the province relaxed restrictions on some industries, and currently there are landscaping jobs posted as well.

"And tons of PSWs," she

said.

Dally said they have been getting calls from people and businesses who need help understanding some of the government relief programs.

That's an area where staff can help, Dally said.

And she expects more jobs will be posted in the coming weeks and months as the economy is gradually reopened.

"This is a good time to update your resume, to get some training or take some workshops. If you do it now, you'll be ready to go," she said.

Dally said part of what 2nd Chance does, on top of providing advice to job-seekers, is offer emotional support.

"We've always done that and it's an important part of what we do," she said. "Job loss can be emotionally-damaging. We help people regain their confidence."

To reach 2nd Chance, call 519-823-2440, or visit their website, www.2ndchance.ca.

Fresh Food for Kids expanded

GUELPH - Children who are not attending school might not be getting the meals that are normally provided through Food and Friends, a program of The Children's Foundation of Guelph and Wellington.

Early in the pandemic, the foundation launched an emergency food support program during COVID-19 called Fresh Food for Kids, and that program is growing.

"We are so excited to continue growing our program," says Emma Rogers, CEO. "Recently we have had new supporters reach out to us

wanting to help," she noted.

The Foundation continues to receive requests for support daily.

With the on-going support of local organizations and donors, Fresh Food for Kids deliver to over 400 students per week in Dufferin, Wellington and Guelph, supporting more children than initially planned.

To find out how you can donate or apply to the Fresh Food for Kids program, visit the Children's Foundation website at www.childrensfoundation.org/ways-to-help/fresh-food-for-kids.

Tulip Festival postponed

» FROM PAGE 15

"They immigrated to the Drayton area because they were sponsored by a Dutch farmer here," Ottens said.

It's stories like this the Drayton Tulip Festival committee wants to highlight during the "75+1" anniversary of the Liberation of the Netherlands.

The festival on May 8, 2021 will begin around 1:30pm with a parade led by the Drayton Legion and the laying of wreaths at the cenotaph, as well local churches offering a service at the cenotaph, Spaling explained.

Then the festival will kick off around 2pm, with fun for the whole family.

Spaling said there will be Dutch dancing, a movie compiling memories of people within the Drayton community of the Liberation of the Netherlands, a car show, a shuffleboard contest, a cooking contest, a floral arrangement contest and a photo booth with a tulip and windmill background where people can dress up in traditional Dutch clothing.

Then the day will conclude with a big street dance.

"Once the immigration started coming here, there got to be a lot of Dutch people and they're such a prominent part of our society and it's nice for everyone, even the young kids of Dutch origin, for them to even understand

and to learn about this," Spaling said.

To help prepare for the May 8, 2021 celebration, residents of Mapleton Township are encouraged to plant tulip bulbs (if possible include red, blue and white, the colours of the Netherlands flag) this fall so they can participate in the best yard decoration contest during the festival.

"I encourage everybody to go online and kind of read about [the Liberation of the Netherlands] if they want to participate and then go from there," Spaling said.

"That makes it even more exciting that you know why you're doing it and then it maybe offers you the opportunity to put in colours accordingly how you think."

Spaling hopes the 2021 festival will bring people together.

"We want it to be a community thing and I find ... as community grows you become so disconnected and I'm hoping and praying that this is something that will pull the community together to come out and have a good time," she said.

She added, "Life is short and if you don't come and support and be together as a community then you're always left out and you don't feel that you belong anywhere."

"We're small. We don't need to have that feeling."