

A black and white portrait of a young man with light-colored hair, wearing a dark military cap and uniform. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a plain, light color.

Faces

Edited by
Frank Mehring en
Jaap Verheul

of Liberation

Inkijxemplaar

The Canadian War Cemetery in Groesbeek is the final resting place of 2,618 soldiers from Canada and the British Commonwealth. Many of them were killed during the liberation of Europe in the final months of the Second World War. In addition, the impressive Groesbeek Memorial bears the engraved names of 1,011 soldiers who have been missing since the crossing of the Seine in August 1944.

This richly illustrated book brings their stories to life. Who were these young men who gave their lives for freedom, democracy and peace? *Faces of Liberation* is not only a historical document, but also a living tribute to the deep transatlantic ties between the Netherlands and Canada. Thanks to the efforts of Dutch volunteers, who maintain contact with Canadian relatives, the memories of these fallen servicemen live on.

With special attention to the Canadian contribution to the liberation of the Netherlands, the role of First Nations soldiers, and the way in which this history is commemorated in both countries, *Faces of Liberation* offers a novel perspective on the legacy of war and how it is remembered. The extensive lists of names of the fallen and missing also makes it not only a unique reference work but also a powerful reminder of our enduring duty to remember.

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FACES TO GRAVES

Inkijkexemplaar

Edited by Frank Mehring and Jaap Verheul

FACES OF LIBERATION THE GROESBEEK CANADIAN WAR CEMETERY

Authors

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD

9 The Ambassador of Canada to the Netherlands

INTRODUCTION

10-12 Frank Mehring and Jaap Verheul

1. MEMORY LANDSCAPES OF THE LIBERATION

14-23 Frank Mehring and Jaap Verheul

24-25 Remembering John Wilbert Walsh

2. IN SPITE OF ALL OBSTACLES: CANADA'S LIBERATION CAMPAIGN IN NORTHWEST EUROPE

26-41 John Goheen with Mark Zuehlke

42-43 Remembrance, Endurance,
and Comradeship

3. THE HISTORY OF THE GROESBEEK CANADIAN WAR CEMETERY

44-57 Rense Havinga

58-61 Witness to the Liberation

4. REMEMBERING WITH STORIES: THE VOLUNTEERS OF THE FACES TO GRAVES FOUNDATION

62-67 Alice van Bakkum and Saskia Peters

68-69 The Keepers of Memories

5. FIRST NATIONS AND MÉTIS SOLDIERS AT THE GROESBEEK CANADIAN WAR CEMETERY

70-77 Mathilde Roza

78-79 Students Bridge Borders to
Commemorate Liberation

6. THE LIBERATION BY THE CANADIANS IN DUTCH CULTURAL MEMORY

80-93 Frank Mehring and Jaap Verheul

94-95 Students of All Saints High School
in Kanata Bring History to Life

7. THE LIBERATION OF THE NETHERLANDS IN CANADIAN CULTURAL MEMORY

96-105 Dean Burry

106-109 Liberation Tours to Groesbeek

LIFE STORIES OF THE FALLEN

110-232

LIST OF NAMES - GROESBEEK CANADIAN WAR CEMETERY

234-297

LIST OF NAMES - GROESBEEK MEMORIAL

300-311

THE VOLUNTEERS OF THE RESEARCH TEAM

312

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

312-313

NOTES

314-319

Le Régiment de la Chaudière
soldiers—partially screened
from observation by smoke—
advance along a dyke toward
Kleve, 10 February 1945. Colin
C.McDougall, LAC-PA 159561.



FOREWORD

His Excellency Mr. Hugh Adsett
Ambassador of Canada to the Netherlands

The bond between Canada and the Netherlands was forged in the sacrifice of the Second World War. The scale of Canada's involvement in the conflict was unprecedented. Never before—or since—had so many Canadians been deployed overseas in combat. The First Canadian Army in northwestern Europe, commanded by a Canadian general, was the largest field army in our history. While the First World War had already shaped Canada's identity on the global stage, the Second World War was the first conflict Canada entered as a fully sovereign nation.

Among all the theatres of war, the Netherlands holds a unique place in Canada's history. From the Battle of the Scheldt in 1944 to the final advances into northeastern Netherlands in 1945, Canadian forces played a decisive role in securing victory. But this victory came at a great cost. Approximately 7,600 Canadian soldiers died during the Liberation of the Netherlands, and over 5,700 remain buried here today. Of those, 2,282 lie at rest in Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery. They rest in a land that is not a distant foreign one anymore, but one where its inhabitants have adopted our fallen sons as theirs.

From this formative experience, the bond between Canada and the Netherlands has only deepened, strengthened by commemoration and remembrance. The Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, one of three Canadian war cemeteries in the Netherlands, stands as a powerful symbol of this enduring relationship. Among its silent rows of headstones rest thousands of young Canadians who fought and fell for the liberation of the Netherlands, securing the freedoms we cherish today.

This book, *Faces of Liberation: The Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery*, is more than a historical record. It is a deeply moving tribute, restoring the names, faces, and personal stories of those who made the ultimate sacrifice. Through meticulous research and heartfelt dedication, the Faces to Graves Foundation ensures that these soldiers are remembered not just as combatants, but as sons, brothers, and friends—young men

with hopes and dreams, families and futures—before they were lost in the fight against tyranny. By gaining a deeper understanding of their lives, we come to truly appreciate the magnitude of their sacrifice and connect with them on a profoundly personal level.

Canada's role in the liberation of the Netherlands remains a defining chapter in our shared history. Every year, Dutch families, students, and volunteers continue to honour this legacy, adopting graves, sharing stories, and ensuring that remembrance never fades. This ongoing dedication is a testament to the power of memory and the responsibility we all share in preserving it.

As Canada and the Netherlands mark the 80th anniversary of liberation, this book serves as a bridge between past and present. It invites us to reflect on the cost of freedom and our duty to uphold it. While history moves forward, the sacrifices of those who rest at Groesbeek must never be forgotten.

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the authors, researchers, and volunteers who have brought this project to life. May these stories inspire future generations to honour the past, cherish peace, and strengthen the ties between our two nations.

INTRODUCTION

Frank Mehring
and Jaap Verheul

In the Canadian War Cemetery in Groesbeek 2,618 servicemen are buried who fell during the Second World War. The Wall of Remembrance in the cemetery pays a moving tribute to another 1,011 soldiers missing in action. Most of the fallen are from Canada, but members of the armed forces of the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and other allied countries also rest here. It is the largest British Commonwealth field of honor in the Netherlands.

Many of these soldiers died during the Rhineland Offensive. This offensive, which began in February 1945, broke the German defenses in the Rhineland and opened the way to the heart of Germany. It heralded the final phase of the war and led to the collapse of the Third Reich and the unconditional surrender of Germany on 8 May 1945.

The Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery stands as a tribute to the sacrifice and bravery of these young men who voluntarily served to liberate Europe. Each of them has a unique and poignant story. This book gives them a face by telling their life stories for future generations. Through these accounts, we gain insight into the young men who courageously fought for a noble cause and gave their lives in the defense of our freedom. They fought a totalitarian regime to restore democratic governance, uphold the rule of law, and secure a peaceful society. Their stories prompt reflection on the sacrifices made for values that today may seem self-evident, reminding us that what is valuable must always be defended.

These stories have been collected over many years by the volunteers of the Faces to Graves foundation, which has taken the initiative to honor the servicemen by writing their life stories and liaising with next-of-kin and families in Canada. This effort has created a unique bond that bridges the Atlantic Ocean. Through these stories, the Canadian cemetery has become a rich heri-

tage site that keeps this past alive for the Dutch community, their overseas allies, and anyone interested in this period of war and conflict. This book tells the story of a unique memorial site in the border area of the Netherlands and Germany that symbolizes the bond with Canada and the British Commonwealth.

In this book, we have gathered over one hundred life stories of fallen soldiers. Each story is accompanied by a portrait, and in some cases, additional photographs that offer a richer glimpse into their lives. Whenever possible, we selected stories where the descendants had connected with the Faces to Graves foundation, providing deeper insight into commemoration and emphasizing the significance of their loved one's sacrifice in the liberation of the Netherlands. Through these efforts, we hope to honor not only the lives lost but also the enduring impact of their sacrifice on future generations.

When compiling *Faces of Liberation*, careful consideration was given to which life stories would be chosen. The aim was to provide a good and broad picture of Canadian soldiers. For this reason, stories were selected from different parts of Canada, to make it clear that the whole nation made a contribution. The various military units in which they served were also considered, to show the diversity of tasks and experiences.

Another important point was ethnic diversity. The Canadian armed forces consisted of soldiers from different backgrounds, and the project also wanted to show the often-forgotten contributions of minorities. In addition, the ages of the soldiers were taken into account, from young recruits to older veterans, to show that different generations were represented. Fallen soldiers were also included with their decorations, because their acts of courage and dedication are important to recognise.

A practical challenge was finding sufficient information in the archives. Almost all biographical details were taken from the Faces to Graves Foundation database. In some cases, additional research was necessary, particularly to find clear photos of the soldiers so that a literal ‘face’ of the liberation could be shown. All of this shows that the project strives for an honest, rich and visually strong remembrance of the Canadian soldiers.

Please, consult the Digital Monument of the Faces to Graves Foundation for additional information about all the life stories: <https://www.facestograves.nl/>

The introductory chapters explore the historical and cultural significance of the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery. Frank Mehring and Jaap Verheul discuss the cemetery’s importance as a transnational heritage location, emphasizing its role in preserving the collective memory of the war, in the border region of the Netherlands and Germany, as well as in transatlantic relations. This context is further enriched by an examination of the Canadian Armed Forces’ critical involvement in the liberation of the Netherlands and the Rhineland Offensive, as detailed by John Goheen and Mark Zuehlke. Rense Havinga of the Freedom Museum provides an insightful history of the cemetery itself, inaugurated by Queen Wilhelmina on 4 May 1947, and managed by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, illustrating the ongoing commitment to honoring those who served. Additionally, the invaluable work of the Faces to Graves foundation is highlighted, showcasing the efforts of volunteers who compile the life stories of the fallen soldiers and maintain connections with their families in Canada. Mathilde Roza shares narratives of soldiers descended from Canada’s Indigenous peoples, adding another layer to the cemetery’s historical tapestry.

In the next chapter, Frank Mehring and Jaap Verheul examine how the liberation of the Netherlands by Canadian forces is represented in Dutch cultural memory. They explore how this pivotal historical event has been commemorated, narrated, and interpreted across various media, including literature, film, visual art, public ceremonies, and educational initiatives. Finally, Dean Burry explores how the liberation of the Netherlands is commemorated in Canadian society and popular culture, reinforcing the enduring legacy of this significant chapter in history. Together, these introductory chapters provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the soldiers’ stories within the broader context of their historical and cultural significance.

Between the chapters, a series of essays underscores the diverse communities and individuals connected to the Canadian War Cemetery in Groesbeek. These vignettes, that are written by Frank Mehring and Jaap Verheul on the basis of interviews, highlight the contributions of volunteers, the presence of visitors, and the engagement of schools and students from the Netherlands, Canada, and beyond. Together, they honor the memory of the men who sacrificed their lives for freedom, showcasing the cemetery as a site of international remembrance and gratitude.

The final section of the book presents a comprehensive list of all identified individuals interred at the Groesbeek War Cemetery, as well as those missing whose names are inscribed on the Memorial Wall. For each member of the armed services, detailed information is provided, including their rank, military unit, and location within the cemetery, ensuring that every person is remembered with dignity and respect. This section serves as both a solemn tribute to their sacrifices and a practical resource for those wishing to locate specific graves. By documenting this information, the memory of these individuals is preserved for future generations, honoring their contributions to the fight for freedom and the liberation of the Netherlands.

Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery,
Photo Frank Mehring

This book is made possible through the collaboration of numerous stakeholders who have contributed their expertise, resources, and networks. The Faces to Graves Foundation, led by Alice van Bekkum (chair), Dick Akerboom + (vice-chair), Jochen Rengers (treasurer), and Saskia Peters, laid the foundation for this book by documenting the life stories of Allied soldiers buried at the Canadian Cemetery Groesbeek, honoring their sacrifice in the fight for freedom.

Our heartfelt gratitude goes to Hans Bak for his unwavering dedication to connecting organizations, volunteers, and researchers. His pioneering efforts in establishing the study of Canada and First Nations peoples at Radboud University have been instrumental in advancing this project. We also extend our sincere thanks to the Research Institute for Culture and History for its generous support, which made it possible to involve a team of committed students in this endeavor. Finally, we are deeply appreciative of the contributions of Radboud students Guus Houben, Sasha Meliefste, Iris de Otter and Maxime Thijssen for their invaluable work on the life stories.

We thank publisher Walburg Pers/Amsterdam University Press, led by Jan-Peter Wissink and May Meurs, for inspiring and publishing this work.

Together, these contributors create a rich tapestry of historical narratives and reflections, ensuring that the stories of soldiers buried at the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery are honored and remembered.



55046 PRIVATE
A.J. MACKEGAN
THE CAPE BRETON HIGHLANDERS
3RD APRIL 1915 AGE 23
ETERNAL REST
HERE LIES THE BODY OF
A.J. MACKEGAN
WHO DIED AT THE FRONT
ON 3RD APRIL 1915
AT THE AGE OF 23

F.32.464 PRIVATE
J.B. CUSACK
THE CAPE BRETON HIGHLANDERS
3RD APRIL 1915 AGE 21
ETERNAL REST
HERE LIES THE BODY OF
J.B. CUSACK
WHO DIED AT THE FRONT
ON 3RD APRIL 1915
AT THE AGE OF 21

1.

MEMORY LANDSCAPES OF THE LIBERATION

Frank Mehring and Jaap Verheul

Column of tanks during the start of
Operation Veritable. DP, Collection
Gelderland



The Canadian War Cemetery at Groesbeek is part of a unique memory landscape in the Netherlands. Each region of the country has developed its own traditions and sites that reflect the diverse impacts of the Second World War and the Nazi occupation. For example, Amsterdam's wartime memory is deeply influenced by the experiences of Nazi persecution and the Holocaust, which devastated its Jewish community. The city is home to numerous memorials that honor this history, including the Anne Frank House, the Auschwitz Monument, the Holocaust Museum, the Jewish Historical Museum, and the Dutch Resistance Museum. The NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies is also located here, which serves as a documentation center housing 2,500 meters of archival documents about the Second World War and as a research institute dedicated to studying these tragic events.

In The Hague, the government center became a focal point for both Nazi administration and resistance activities, such as espionage and sabotage. The city's landscape is marked by remnants of the Atlantic Wall fortifications, a stark reminder of its wartime history. Meanwhile, the inner cities of Rotterdam and Nijmegen bear the scars of bombing raids, with Rotterdam experiencing devastation on 14 May 1940, and Nijmegen on 22 February 1944. These attacks left lasting marks that modern architecture cannot fully erase.

The region surrounding Nijmegen, Arnhem, and Kleve witnessed intense ground fighting during the war, significantly shaping its collective memory. Within this broader context, the Canadian War Cemetery at Groesbeek stands as a poignant tribute to the sacrifices made during these battles, highlighting the enduring legacy of those who fought for freedom.¹

GROESBEEK AT WAR

Groesbeek became a heritage site symbolizing the connection between Canada and the Netherlands due to its pivotal role in the battles that took place there between September 1944 and the liberation of the Netherlands. As a quiet rural village nestled between Nijmegen and the German border, Groesbeek had seen little change before the Second World War. Known primarily as a community of broom makers, it was home to a few thousand inhabitants, most of whom were engaged in agriculture. The economic modernization and growth that characterized the early twentieth century largely bypassed Groesbeek. The economic crisis of the 1930s hit the village hard, leading to widespread unemployment and growing social dissatisfaction.²

The relative calm of Groesbeek was brutally interrupted by the chaos of war. This town experienced heavy fighting not just once, but three times during the conflict. When Nazi Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, marking the beginning of the Second World War, the Dutch government quickly mobilized its forces. Barbed wire, sentries, and roadblocks were erected between Groesbeek and the nearby German border, but these defenses proved futile. In the early hours of 10 May 1940, German troops crossed the border with