

## APPENDIX 2

### THE 34<sup>TH</sup> OF FOOT RETURNING FOR THE 50<sup>TH</sup> BY AIR

I think that it was possibly in February or March that the application form came through. I read through it very carefully, then slid it into the waste paper basket. No earthly chance of my returning to Arnhem, no chance at all. My wife was not in the best of health, certainly not well enough for me to take the trip to Europe, leaving her on her own, on top of which, two or three very excellent Australian heart surgeons had had their instruments sharpened on my behalf. They had completed a wonderful job on me: 5 heart by-passes 6 years ago and now an invitation to go to Arnhem. There has to be a limit for all things and a trip of this sort, at the tender age of 77 years was just a bit much. I did rescue the application form from the waste paper basket, and slipped it, without a great deal of ceremony, into my "Never Mind File".

Some months later, a Para friend of mine rang up with the question, "Joe, will you go to Arnhem with me?" My immediate answer to that question was "No! No! No! no chance at all." As my wife and I live in a two-roomed cottage, she naturally heard my side of the conversation, and as soon as I put the phone down, she asked me what was all the "No No No" business about. She then said that I should ring straight back and tell the Para gentleman "Yes! Yes! Yes!"

She and I discussed the affair over and over again, and finally came to an arrangement that she, under the care of our family doctor, should go into a Nursing Home for the month that I would need to do the Arnhem thing and to travel (at speed) to Amsterdam-Arnhem, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Carlisle, Aspatria, Morpeth, Long Framlington, return to Carlisle Castle, Aspatria, Whitehaven, Nelson Manchester, Amsterdam and fly from there via Warsaw, Moscow, Tashkent, Kabul, Lahore, Delhi, Calcutta, Singapore, Sydney to Melbourne.

Fortunately, for both my Para friend and I, our Welfare Officer was flying to Europe for a seven weeks holiday, and, as she had always been interested in the Arnhem affair, she accompanied us as a carer.

Should you, dear reader, have any doubt about the fact that this sort of trip might become a little tiresome, allow me to give you a certain amount of detail: A 35 minute trip to the Airfield, and then a 2 hour wait, a 70 minute flight and then another 2 hour wait. That saw us in Sydney. A 9 hour flight saw us in Singapore, where we were allowed a half hour leg stretch followed by a 13 ½ hour flight to Amsterdam. From there we followed the simple process of travelling in three different trains and finally we arrived at Oosterbeek Station.

Oosterbeek is a beautiful, elegant place. We had mauled it rather badly fifty years ago,

mauled it with the very expert help from far more Germans than were supposed to be there, with a great deal more of the mauling equipment than we had. But that was Then. This is Now.

The smiles of welcome on every face, from the eldest of them, to the little children, made every man that was wearing a Red Beret, feel as though he had come back home. They, the people of that fair city, had adopted the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. There is little doubt, that what remained of the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne had adopted them also. The co-operation between the very many organisations that were bent on seeing that we were catered for in every possible way was almost beyond comprehension. I will not name any of these organisations, largely on account of the fact that I cannot name them all, and to miss out on any one would be hurtful to the extreme. It was a matter of which of them could help and guide us most.

When our party first arrived there, we stood fairly near the Station, and were given to wondering how best to get a taxi. Within minutes we were approached by one of the Arnhem people with the question: "Have you a problem of some sort? May I help you?" We explained that there was no great problem, and asked where might we get a taxi. His answer to that was: "Just wait here a few moments." Within minutes he returned, complete with car, loaded our baggage, and then asked: "Where to?"

Fortunately, our hotel was quite near, but the way the man had asked "Where to?" made it sound that no matter where we wanted to be taken, he was set to take us. Our first task after settling in was to report to the Town Hall, where we were given a very large envelope with all the information regarding venues, times and admission tickets, cheap bus fares, booklets and a Dutch/English newspaper.

The next day, of course, had to include a visit to that beautifully kept Oosterbeek Cemetery. The way the place is looked after pays a great compliment to those gallant men that lay there. It is probably true to say, that during the battle, one couldn't do much more than mentally accept that poor old so and so had "bought it". It could be true that the lack of tears at that time was fully compensated for by the fact that almost every Arnhem man appeared to have his handkerchief at the ready. It was raining, of course, the air was quite damp, there were a lot of very wet handkerchiefs, and that fact had nothing to do with the weather.

Some few years ago, I heard that a member of the Signal Platoon was dying of cancer, and that he was distressed by the fact that no one from the Regiment had been in touch with him. I immediately wrote him a long letter, which arrived the day he had passed away. His son opened the letter and he and I have kept in touch ever since that time. I told him that I might make the trip to Arnhem and an answering letter assured me that he would too. We made no arrangements to meet.

At one time, quite early in the piece, I was talking to an ex Signaller and his wife, when I

had a tap on my shoulder by a person I had never seen before. As I turned toward this man, he said: "Excuse me, Sir. I am looking for a Mr. Joe Hardy from Australia." With a question like that he might have tapped a thousand shoulders, it was a bit odd that he tapped mine. My answer brought a smile of relief. I said "You have just found him." We destroyed a few beers together.

If one intended to destroy a beer or two, it quickly became obvious that the place to do just that was the Schoonberger Hotel. In that particular place, every phase of every battle, every skirmish, every patrol, and every action of any sort was fought over time and time again. There was shot and shell flying in every direction, but to the best of my knowledge there were no very serious casualties. There was the odd bod that left the place a wee bit unsteady on his feet. I am given to understand that the Germans thought of the place in roughly the same way we did. They used it as a First Aid Post and Dressing Station.

The Airborne lads were so very popular, that quite a few of their Dutch hosts accompanied them to this particular battle area. One of the great pleasures of the trip was meeting a number of these hosts and the people of Arnhem generally. Perhaps reader, you will think it a bit odd that I met most of the men I had served with in Cemetery. I think that an ex member of my old platoon had the word put around that I was in the area, and a surprising number of fellows came along to say "Hello". Perhaps the most memorable greeting that I was given was: "Yes Joe, I remember you very well. You were a Regimental Old B. . . . .".

My feelings about the Cemetery were of deep and sad reflection, of gallantry the extreme, of remembrance, and of the men that were the salt of the earth remember talking on the No.18 set to me of my platoon. His words I shall never forget "They are coming in now, Sir. Goodbye and good luck". There was no quiver in his voice. I stood beside his headstone, perhaps a little longer than I sic beside the headstones of many other men that I had known so well.

It was during one of the `Schoonberger" battles that my Para friend made mention of the fact that he had been wounded and carried into a Church. Our host immediately came out with the statement that he knew where the Church was. "Would you like to go and see it?" We were all quite sure that it would be of interest, so host suggested that we stay where we were for a few minutes, and that he would go and get his car, and then take us to the Church. He did just that, and five or six of arrived at the entrance to the Church at exactly the same time as a party of three ladies came from behind the Church.

It seems that the elder of the three ladies heard my Pam friend mention that had been carried into the Church when he was wounded. This lady then astounded with the statement that she was one of the ladies that had cared for the wounded. - Para friend very gallantly pointed out that the lady in question was far too young and good-looking to have been there at that time. Without further ado she produced Identity Papers that proved without doubt that she had been about 20 years old in 1944 The next words we heard came

from my Para friend in a half whisper..... good God!"

The lady suggested that we go a few doors further up the street and visit Number 57. Number 57 proved to be the house of Kate Ter Horst, "The Angel Of Arnhem". You, reader, may not know the story of that wonderful lady. It may be sufficient for me to tell you, that throughout the battle, she held her home open and her heart open every wounded man that came past. She kept her children in the cellar, and the rest the house, at every level, was packed with wounded and dying soldiers. The carpets on every floor were soaked with blood and it is said that about 60 men were buried in garden.

She, many times, read parts of the Bible out to the wounded men and at time took her three months old son upstairs to see the wounded men. I had the honour of talking to that son, and to the rest of that wonderful family. Michael, the son is now approximately 50 years old.

Kate Ter Horst was killed by a runaway vehicle. She lost her life on the pavement in front of the garden where so many of men that she cared for had been buried. There was a certain feeling about being invited into that house. There was a certain feeling about being in Arnhem again, about visit the Cemetery and about talking to the Ter Horst family. A feeling very much akin to when I had felt when I walked up the Via del a Rosa, in Jerusalem, almost 60 years ago.