

# STICHTING DRIEL-POLEN



## Newsletter 2020

Dear veterans, widows and relatives of veterans and friends of our Foundation.

What a year 2020 has been! Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this year turned out to be completely different for all of us - so different from what we expected it would be. Already in spring, we considered that the commemoration this year will be in a completely different format. We are pleased that we succeeded in achieving a live stream, thanks to which many of you, both at home and abroad, were able to follow us.

Despite all the limitations we were able to organise a beautiful ceremony. But we missed the presence of our veterans, relatives, friends, and all involved parties enormously. The contrast between this year's commemoration and the one a year ago couldn't have been more noticeable. It was a commemoration with only a few people present, no audience and, above all, no veterans for the first time in 76 years.

We are very sorry to inform you that three veterans who were regular guests at the commemorations in previous years have died: Józef Wojciechowski, Hendryk Kubiński and Konstanty Staszkiwicz. The passing of our dear veterans makes us realize that commemorations without their valuable presence will eventually become a regular feature.

In addition to the commemoration at the monument that could be followed via live stream, this year we organised a few additional events. The overview of the events and their descriptions can be found below.

### **Contribution of the primary schools in Driel:**

On Friday, 18 September, a small group of students from the Meeuwenberg primary school paid a visit to the cemetery in Oosterbeek. After a short introductory speech given by chairman Arno Baltussen, the children paid their respects at the graves of Polish soldiers. They placed bouquets of white and red flowers and lit a candle on every Polish grave. Many of the Polish graves are on the right and left side of the cemetery entrance, as the last ones in the military graveyard section. These are the graves of the soldiers who, after they died, were buried in the cemetery in Driel. In the summer of 1946, they were reburied at the military cemetery in Oosterbeek. The Polish soldiers who died on the north side of the Rhine are buried in the sections with their British comrades. The Polish graves are easy to recognise.



On Monday, 21 September, the students of class 6, 7 and 8 of the primary school De Kameleon, under the supervision of one of their teachers, held a short memorial at the monument on the Polenplein (Polish Square). Each student laid a flower at the monument. The students' contribution to the commemoration was a valuable completion of the celebration in a year when a very limited number of invitees could attend the tribute on Saturday.

### **Unveiling of the Bust:**

On Friday afternoon, 18 September, the bust of Major General Sosabowski was unveiled. The statue is in the park at the intersection of Baltussenweg - Vogelenzangsestraat in Driel.



Opposite the statue, were the headquarters of General Sosabowski, used by him during Operation Market Garden in 1944: Molenstraat 12 in Driel.

The statue in Driel is an exact copy of the bust of the General that was unveiled in Warsaw on 23 September 2017. The banner of the Military William Order was also present at the unveiling. The bust is embellished with the Bronze Lion which, together with the Military William Order, was given to General Sosabowski in 2006 by Queen Beatrix. To acknowledge the marking of the 75th commemoration of Operation Market Garden, the Overbetuwe Municipal Council in July 2019 decided to place the bust in Driel. Due to a busy schedule that year, it was decided to move the unveiling to the 76th anniversary. Thus, the General and unveiling of his bust would receive the attention they rightfully deserved. Unfortunately, we could not know at that time what we know now; a global pandemic was coming to change our lives and plans.

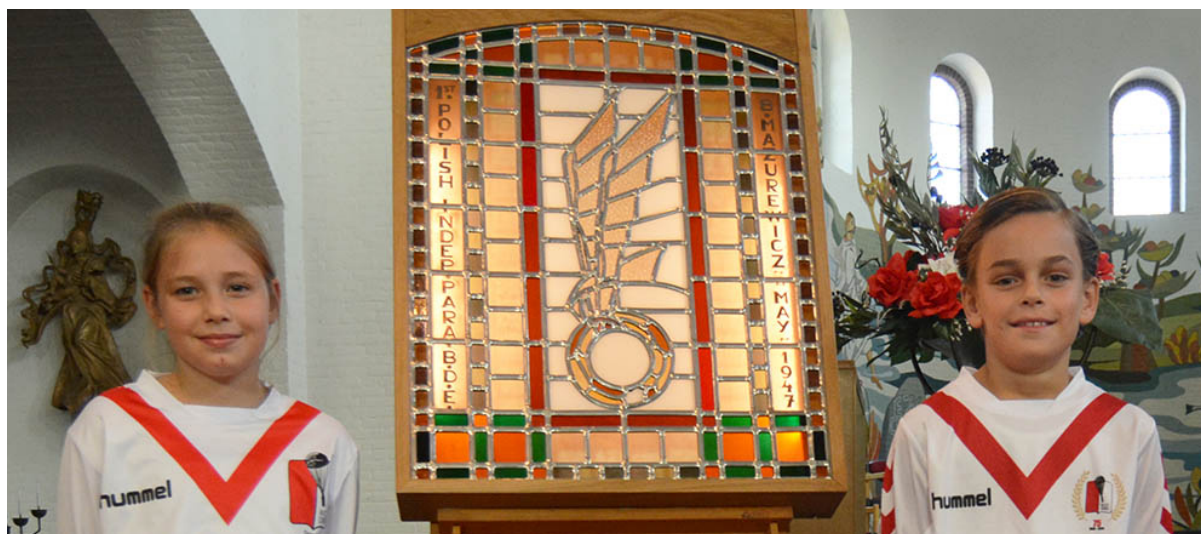
Consequently, only a limited number of invitees were permitted to be present during the unveiling.

We hope that next year we will be able to commemorate the Polish contribution to our freedom in the way we are used to, ideally together with the Sosabowski family. Placing an effigy of General Stanisław Sosabowski underlines the message "Remember, Realize and Experience". It is an expression of the gratitude of the Overbetuwe residents for the extraordinary commitment to our freedom by the 1<sup>st</sup> Polish Independent Parachute Brigade and their brave commander. "The bond that we cherished, cherish and we will continue to cherish", said the Mayor of Overbetuwe Mrs. P. Hoytink-Roubos in her speech.

### **Unveiling of stained-glass window:**

On Friday afternoon, 18 September, a stained-glass window at the Information Centre "The Poles of Driel" was also unveiled. It is a stained-glass window with the image of the Polish paratrooper emblem. The window, together with a substantial amount of money, was gifted by the Polish paratroopers in 1947 to help rebuild the school that was completely destroyed in 1944. The money was used to sponsor the central heating in the school building. The window has been restored thanks to the support of the local football association celebrating its 75th anniversary this year. The association was founded in 1945 and the outfit of the footballers has the colours of the Polish flag: white shirts and red shorts. The latter adopted emblem depicts a paratrooper against a white-red background. Every Saturday during the football season, 35 football teams appear on the football fields in these characteristic Polish colours.

Hereby the [link](#) describing the full history of Football Association:





## **Commemoration:**

As stated before, this year, the commemoration was entirely unique. Last year, about 3,000 guests and involved parties gathered on and around the Polenplein (The Polish Square). This year there were hardly 30 of them. Unfortunately, the commemoration was celebrated without veterans and their relatives. It would have been irresponsible for them to travel and be present at this tribute.

After 75 years we felt incomplete without our beloved veterans, the choir and orchestra of the Dutch and Polish youth, the young people from Poland who used to write poems, as well as many volunteers and a thousand interested onlookers.

Luckily, the live streaming made it possible to follow the commemoration. The many reactions we received, from home and abroad, made it clear to us that the live stream was greatly appreciated.

For many volunteers, it was quite painful that they could not make their usual annual contribution.

The youth of the football club had to get used to having a bigger role in the process of laying wreaths, but they did a great job, and their presence was highly valued by all attendees via the live stream.

We do hope that next year we will be able to celebrate this wonderful commemoration in the old manner with veterans present, as well as their relatives and many parties involved.



## **Changes within the board of the Driel- Polen Foundation:**

In February 2020, a change took place within the board of the foundation. Stineke Veenhuizen has handed over the position of secretary to Ellis Beke. As it can be noticed there is a different person next to the e-mail address [info@driel-polen.nl](mailto:info@driel-polen.nl).

Hereby the messages from both ladies:

### **Stineke**

"In January 2011 I took over the position of the secretary of the foundation from Luit G. Veenhuizen, my husband, who passed away in October 2010.

Thanks to him, I was already familiar with the members of the foundation board: Arno and Niek. As a volunteer I participated for several years during the commemoration day, at first as a first aid worker, and later I was the one responsible for registration of the wreaths and flower arrangements. The latter role I shared with Bep Jacobs who took over from Hans Kardol.

The responsibilities of the secretary include keeping the address file, taking the minutes of the board meetings, sending the invitations and keeping up correspondence. At that time, nobody knew that during the next nine years the foundation would grow and develop greatly.

The database of the addresses grew bigger and email addresses were added. The agenda became fuller and the meetings became more complex. The reports became longer and lists of activities were added.

The digital age came with help; many invitations and newsletters were sent by e-mail. The telephones were used less and less, and also the correspondence became scarce, but the computers were fully engaged. Lots of communication happened and kept on happening thanks to this means of communication.

I got to know many people by e-mail; in such a way, communication was easier and faster.

On commemoration day I always saw many familiar faces but, because of my responsibilities during the commemoration, I hardly ever had time to talk to them. Also, during the reception, I didn't have a chance to greet all of our guests. My priority was to talk to the relatives of the veterans. It is to them I gave all my attention. The veterans were important to me. After all, it was they who had fought for our freedom. It was always a great privilege for me to greet them again and again.

Like everyone else within the board, I was saddened by the news that, within a very short period, the veterans Józef Wojciechowski, Hendryk Kubiński and Konstanty Staszkiwicz had passed away. These three paratroopers attended the commemorations for years. I will cherish warm and dear memories of them.

Last nine years were precious to me, with many highlights I could participate in:

- The opening of the Information Centre "Verbonden door vriendschap en dankbaarheid" (Connected by Friendship and Gratitude) on 18 September 2014,
- The visit of HRH King Willem Alexander and President of the Republic of Poland Dr. B. Komorowski during the 70th Commemoration in 2014,
- The Prize for Volunteers in 2014 granted by the municipality of Overbetuwe,
- Donation of the photographic exhibition (modern version) purchased by Cora Baltussen to the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw on 13 April 2015, followed by another donation of the original photos on 24 September 2015 to the 6th Airborne Brigade Poland in Krakow,
- The baptism of the General Sosabowski tulip on 8 May 2017,
- The unveiling of the bust of General Sosabowski in Warsaw on 23 September 2017.

And finally, the 75th Commemoration in 2019 with the opening of the exhibition of the Polish Army Museum at the Information Centre, the Saturday parachuting on Boltweg, the commemoration on Polenplein (The Polish Square) honoured by the presence of the Prince of Wales, HRH Prince Charles, and last, but not least, Sunday's closing of the Airborne commemorations on the flood plains with a crossing over the Rhine.

This year, during the 76th Commemoration, I was pleasantly surprised by receiving the Polish Army Medal, in silver, awarded by the Minister of Defence of the Republic of Poland. The medal was given to me by the Polish Ambassador of the Netherlands Dr. Marcin Czepelak.

With gratitude and sentiment, I look back onto those wonderful years in the Driel-Polen Foundation. The foundation will become stronger in the hands of the new secretary Ellis Beke-Altink. I am happy that she has taken over the position. I wish her wonderful and instructive years within the foundation. Finally, I would like to thank everyone for the nice contact, and I hope to see many of you at the upcoming, COVID-19 free, commemoration in Driel.

Best regards and stay healthy”,  
Stineke Veenhuizen - Poppen 20 November 2020



### Ellis

“The Polish commemoration has been in my life as long as I can remember. In 1974 as a 3-year-old girl, I came to live in Driel. My parents had opened their home as a host family to the Polish veterans who annually attended the commemoration. In 1979, when I was 8 years old, we welcomed at our house veteran Arciszewski and his wife Ludmiła. A year later during the summer holidays we visited them in London. After that, my father was asked by Albert Baltussen, Cora's brother, to become a secretary of the Driel-Poland committee, as it was still called at that time. As a schoolgirl I laid flowers during the commemorations, sang in the children's choir. Later I became a hostess; I received guests, laid wreaths and raised one of the flags. During the last two years I coordinated the wreath laying and in 2019 I was asked to take over the position of the secretary within the board. For a moment I hesitated. I knew very well that Stineke was extremely busy preparing every year's commemoration. After a short while I made a decision; I decided to take up the position. It is an honour for me to be able to continue building the bond with Poland, the bond I have developed through all the years being so close to the Polish commemoration. It remains important to tell the story of the Poles of Driel to new generations so that this piece of history could live forever”



*Cora Baltussen and me during wreath laying at one of the commemorations.*



### **Awards:**

In addition to Stineke Veenhuizen being awarded the silver medal, two ladies: Bep Jacobs and Margreet Altink were also awarded the bronze military medal of the Polish army. The medals were given to the ladies after the commemoration by the Polish ambassador of the Netherlands Dr. Marcin Czepelak. We, as the Driel-Polen Foundation, are extremely proud of these ladies and thankful for all the work they have done throughout the years.



### **Ongoing projects:**

Last year we informed you that we started various projects. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all the current projects are delayed or partially stopped. We have been granted a year's delay permission for the realisation of the ongoing projects. All of them should be completed by the end of May 2021.

- the renovation of the stained-glass window is now completed. See above.
- installing of the displays at the Information Centre. The interviews with eyewitnesses have been postponed. We do hope to be able to record at least some of them before the end of May. The displays with the interviews that we already have will be installed at the Information Centre before the end of May.
- A presentation with an extensive outdoor exhibition is almost finished. See ([Polish liberators: Extra information at the panels](#) - Foundation Driel-Polen ([driel-polen.nl](http://driel-polen.nl))). Information needed for the presentation can be obtained only thanks to individual interviews. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 guidelines that made the interviews impossible to happen, we were only able to achieve one online presentation in collaboration with the Polen in Beeld (Poland in Picture) organization. All of the other presentations had to be postponed. If you are interested in an online lecture or - as soon as it is possible again - a lecture at your location, please contact us at: [Info@driel-polen.nl](mailto:Info@driel-polen.nl)
- developing a route app that can be used by walkers, cyclists, or motorists. The route is already announced, and all the necessary information has been gathered. In collaboration with other Airborne municipalities, we are working on digital content for the route and we hope to have this challenge ready before the end of May.

## **Digitisation of the archive - A call:**

In September, with the support of partners such as the Airborne Museum and the Gelders Archief, we submitted two applications for a subsidy to digitise our archive. One of the applications has been approved. The decision about the other one is expected to be announced in February.

We estimate that from the budget needed, € 5,000 will not be covered by the subsidies. We hope to be able to involve volunteers who will minimise the costs of the digitisation.

We kindly ask all people who wish to help the foundation and make it possible to achieve the project of digitisation to donate a contribution. The contribution can be transferred to our account NL67 RABO 0315 1131 46 BIC: RABONL2U with a note "Archive".

For more information you can have a look at:

[Support the preservation of our archive! - Stichting Driel-Polen \(driel-polen.nl\)](https://driel-polen.nl)

Volunteers can register via: [info@driel-polen.nl](mailto:info@driel-polen.nl).

## **Plans for 2021:**

In addition to the completion of the ongoing projects and the required attention for their official commissioning, we have planned, for the coming year, a number of special events:

### **Football match on Sunday, 19 September 2021**

As part of celebration of the 75th anniversary, we will organise a football match between be the first team and the team of the 6th Airborne Brigade from Poland. The match was initiated by the local football association, which is fully described in one of the previous chapters. The football match will take place on 19 September 2021, provided there will be no limitations resulting from Corona measures.

The match will allow the local football association to give honour and glory to the Polish liberators.

### **Musical "Bring my love to Poland"**

The Music Herveld Foundation is working on a musical "Bring my love to Poland". The idea was initiated by the 75th anniversary of liberation of our country from German occupation. The exact date of the performance is to be announced.

### **Commemoration 2021**

The commemoration in Driel is scheduled for **Saturday, 18 September at 3 p.m.**

**We sincerely hope that the health of the veterans and the widows of the veterans of the Polish 1<sup>st</sup> Independent Parachute Brigade will allow them to attend the commemoration next year.**

**We wish you a Merry Christmas and a prosperous and healthy 2021.**

December 2020

Driel-Poland Foundation

