



Stichting Herdenkingsmonument Mierlo-Hout  
**News letter**  
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## **Just another memorial**



After the German invasion of the Netherlands on May 10, 1940, Dutch soldiers emigrated to Belgium.

Some of them eventually managed to reach Great Britain.

The soldiers came from the Infantry with Cyclist Corps, Cavalry, Artillery, Engineers, Aviation Department and Military Policemen.

Establishment of the Brigade in 1941.

The Royal Dutch Brigade was founded on January 11, 1941.

The Brigade receives its final name from Queen Wilhelmina. On August 27, 1941, she presented the banner with her granddaughter's name on it at the base camp in Wolverhampton, Great Britain.

The Royal Dutch Brigade "Princess Irene" is therefore a fact.

After their intensive training, the Brigade landed in Normandy in early August 1944.

She takes part in the campaign through France and Belgium and is involved in the liberation of Tilburg.



F I Dirk Norder

The Princess Irene Brigade bridge, traditionally known as the Maasbrug Hedel or Hedelse bridge, is an arch and girder bridge in the Netherlands, spanning the Maas. The bridge has a total length of 436 meters. Over the bridge lies the Old Rijksweg, part of National Highway 2 until December 12, 1970.



F I Dirk Norder

## THE ACTION AT HEDEL – 22 – 25 APRIL 1945

In the period April 10 - 14, 1945, the Royal Dutch Brigade "Princess Irene" departs from Zeeland. The Irene Brigade carried out surveillance tasks in that province during the winter '44 - '45. A period of relative peace, after the landing in Normandy in August and the actions in Belgium, Grave and Tilburg in the following months.

The area north of Den Bosch, on the Maas, will become the new operating area. The Dutch come under the command the 116th Brigade, sergeant C.F. Phillips. The section on the Den Bosch - Hedel railway line, up to Heusden, is taken over by the Brigade from the Canadians and must be protected against possible actions by the Germans on the other side of the Maas.

Soon after arriving at the new positions, a rumor spreads that "something", possibly a crossing over the Maas, is coming. Lieutenant de Roos, successor commander of Battle Group I, is given permission to conduct a reconnaissance patrol across the Maas. Really a job for this adventurous, tall Zwolle resident, former mining engineer, who ended up with the Irene Brigade from Canada as a volunteer.



F I Dirk Norder

## **Tuesday April 18/Wednesday April 19**

On the night of April 18 to 19, a patrol will attempt to make a crossing.

Even before leaving the starting point, a canal near Fort Crêvecoeur, an old defense structure located directly opposite Hedel, the storm boat borrowed from the English sinks. Don't worry, there is an old rowing boat at the lock. However, you have to row against an unexpectedly strong current. The crossing takes more than an hour and a half. The patrol lasts more than two hours through enemy-occupied territory between the towns of Hedel and Ammerzoden. The return journey is of course much easier, it now only takes half an hour. By six o'clock in the morning, the men have returned from their dangerous journey.

Around the same time, another source of information came forward. Gefreiter Walter serves in a Kriegsmarine unit stationed ashore. The man sees his transfer as a demotion. Bitter, and in a drunken mood, he curses the Führer and his regime. When he is told that he will have to report to the Gruppenführer, he sees only one way out: across the Maas! He reaches the rampart near Bokhoven and is captured. He turns out to be a source of interesting information.

## **Thursday April 19**

The Maas will be crossed from the current setups. This will have to happen near the town of Hedel.

To Battle Group I "the honor" to carry out the operation, as far as the Brigade share is concerned. The major immediately starts working on his plans. In a discussion with his officers, it is decided to send two more patrols across the Maas.

## **Friday April 20**

Late in the evening, four non-commissioned officers and fifteen men gather at the Fort's canal. The group sets off with two storm boats, a small and a large one, again borrowed from 28 Royal Marines.

Crossing the windy Maas now only takes half an hour. It is a clear night with lots of moonlight. So actually, not very suitable for this patrol work. At exactly 2 a.m. the men go ashore at kilometer marker 26, in a bend of the river south-west of Hedel. Minefields must be detected. Any other indications of enemy activity will be identified.

Hedel is reached. The village has been severely damaged by artillery bombardments in recent months. The population has therefore been evacuated. So, it is a real ghost village. Apart from several temporary residents...

More than three hours later the patrol returns along the same road. No incidents, but valuable information was collected for the planned action.

## **Saturday April 22**

The next patrol leaves at a quarter past eleven in the evening. Two more boats with a total of sixteen men.

Once again five men are left behind at the landing site. A group of five goes exploring in the direction of Hedel. Another group, the remaining six in the direction of Ammerzoden. The intention is for the latter group to split into two again.

However, it will not come to that.

As the men crouch down through a dry ditch, one of them steps on a foot mine and loses his leg. A guardsman is the unfortunate one. The sergeant major walking in front of him gets some splinters in the back. That does not prevent him from lifting the seriously injured man onto his back and taking him back to the landing site. The reduced patrol continues its way. They have now been warned...

## **Sunday April 22**

The men return at half past five in the morning. The information collected by the scouts is used to develop an attack plan that must be implemented today.

In the evening, the men of Battle Group I gather at the lock of Fort Crêvecoeur. Around midnight, three Buffaloes (amphibious landing vehicles with a silent engine), manned by British Engineers, leave. They are not noticed by the enemy, even though it is a clear moon night.

Fifteen minutes later the command group and the first and second platoons are put ashore at post 26. To leave nothing to chance, the scouts of the past few nights have preceded them and have cordoned off the route and the minefields with posts.

The Buffaloes immediately return to pick up the third and fourth platoons. However, due to technical problems, they arrive an hour later.

A dozen British soldiers from the Royal Engineers, assigned to the second and fourth platoons, begin checking the area around the landing point for obstacles. These appear to be hardly or not at all present. In any case, they are not booby-trapped (equipped with inconspicuously placed explosive charges). The mine detectors they brought along prove useful.

The platoons set off through the night, towards Hedel. Only the first platoon remains behind to guard the landing site.

The village is reached quickly and without any problems. It looks deserted and spooky in the bright moonlight. Ladders and chairs are against the facades of the houses. The Germans use this to indicate the places where mines and booby traps have been placed. Caution is therefore advised, but fortunately nothing explodes.

Some men from the second platoon fall over trip wires, which activate a bell at the destroyed railway bridge. Too bad, several Germans at the post there have now managed to escape. Some others, on the southern edge of the village, are less fortunate and are taken prisoner of war. They are completely surprised.

The men quickly take up their defense positions. The fourth platoon in the area of the viaduct, east under the Den Bosch - Zaltbommel road. The third platoon in the north, above the Woerd. The second platoon on the western edge of the village, in and around the ruins of the St. John's School.

The command post is located in a destroyed building that was once the proud shop and home of butcher Van den Bogert. This post, on Kleinveld, is centrally located.

The radio connections cause some problems in the beginning. The Corporal of the Signals (communication department), together with four others, knows a radio with batteries, a wake. 22 set, to be carried from the landing point to the Kleinveld. A tough and dangerous job. The radio station is immediately installed and although the corporal has never worked with such a device, he immediately sits behind the controls. Contact is soon made with the Brigade headquarters "on the other side".

The radio connection with the landing site takes a little longer.

### **Monday April 23**

Slowly the light becomes...

The platoon at the landing site sees the enemy first. Around half past seven they are startled by gunfire from the direction of Ammerzoden. It turns out to be a group of about six people, who stay about a kilometer away. They dig themselves into the dike.

A three-man patrol from the fourth platoon encounters a German in the forecourt. The man runs away. Refusing the stenguns: a common problem and luck for the conscious soldier...

The second platoon, grouped in and around the burned-out ruins of the St. Jansschool, peers with its binoculars in the direction of Ammerzoden. He suddenly sees men on foot and on bicycles.

They are unarmed and dressed in blue. It is then eight o'clock in the morning. The lieutenant decides not to take any risks and has the Vickers heavy machine guns assigned to his platoon fire a few warning bursts. The blue figures disappear.

### **Tuesday April 24**

The next morning, more reinforcements arrive in Hedel. The 1st platoon and the fourth are put across the Maas. The platoons of Combat Group III will be given a "recce position" for the time being, which means that they can be deployed for patrol tasks.

The support group also arrives. The various sections of this group are added to the existing sections of Combat Group I. The two mortar sections now together have six 3-inch (= 8 cm) mortars. The anti-tank sections stationed at the command post have four 6-pounder guns and four

2-inch mortars at their disposal. Furthermore, there are now two sections with a total of four light 2cm guns. The four Vickers machine guns of the newly arrived support group are assigned to the four infantry platoons. These platoons also have a 2-inch mortar themselves.

There is a lot of firepower in the small Hedel bridgehead. Especially when you add the supporting artillery fire. These are the six pieces of the Battery Artillery (25-pounders) and more than 20 pieces of the British.

After the arrival of the reinforcements, the message is received that Battle Group III will not come across in its entirety.

In the morning, mines are discovered at the landing point. For safety reasons, the Buffalos no longer use the place where the old ship bridge used to be. The landings take place at a place next to it, which is slightly less ideal.

The second platoon of Battle Group III is ordered to clear the site of mines, together with twelve British Engineers. The platoon has just returned from Tilburg, where they guarded the headquarters of Netherlands District.

### **Wednesday April 25**

It is still dark when the men of the fourth platoon are rudely awakened by German artillery, mortar and machine gun fire. It's quarter past five. He radios the command post that his platoon is under attack and needs reinforcement immediately. The confusion is great.

One of those sections is almost completely eliminated when a direct hit from a Panzerfaust hits. Section 2, north of the viaduct, is also taken by surprise. They can only get away by covering their retreat with hand grenades. At least one enemy soldier is killed as a result.

As it turns out, an entire German battalion (about 1,200 men) launched the attack. The noise of the battle is deafening and creates confusion in the hand.

At ten past five it can be reported that the enemy attack has been repulsed. The third platoon occupies the positions of the virtually eliminated fourth platoon.

Small groups of Germans continue to attack. However, the threat of a large, concentrated attack in this corner is over.

There is also heavy fighting on the other side of Hedel. Some groups of Germans have moved around Hedel and are attacking from the west. The second platoon at St. John's School is also surprised. Their lieutenant is immediately injured, even by his own mortar shell! However, the platoon manages to stop the enemy. There is no question of an impending breakthrough.

The 1st platoon, in the north of Hedel, is also startled. The enemy manages to approach the farm almost unnoticed. Suddenly a bunch of Germans jump out from behind a potato pile in front of the farm, firing with all their might. The platoon is ready and fires on the approximately 20 enemy soldiers. A fierce battle breaks out. The Germans manage to set the farm on fire. The men must get out. Everyone remains calm and under cover of the smoke the platoon manages to leave the position without losses. After the farm has burned down, patrols are sent forward again to retake the old positions. The situation is under control again and one section is sent to his right neighbor who is in trouble.

The Irene Brigade manages to maintain its position.



F | Dirk Norder

A total of 12 men from the Irene Brigade are killed and more than 30 are injured. 53 soldiers died on the German side.

On April 26, 1945, the Irene Brigade was ordered to withdraw to their starting position on the southern bank of the Maas. Hedel is then largely destroyed.

After the capitulation on May 5, 1945, the Princess Irene Brigade was given the honor of being the first Allied unit to enter The Hague.

On May 26, 1948, the Regiment was elevated to a Guard Regiment by Royal Decree, a name that indicates its special relationship with the Royal House.



F | TRACESOFWAR

On June 10, 2003, Tony Herbrink and H van Beers, together with two students, unveiled a monument to commemorate 12 soldiers of the Princess Irene Brigade, who died during the fighting in Hedel from April 22 to 26, 1945.

Want to read more about the Princess Irene Brigade?  
Then visit [www.prinsesirenebrigade.nl](http://www.prinsesirenebrigade.nl);

Our thanks also go to Hans Sonnemans for allowing us to use parts of his text.

### Then and now



The farm, owned by the Van Vlerken family, was inhabited by the Keijzers family until the 1960s. This is where 20-year-old John Bruce Millar was killed. Dangerously injured, the English tank commander sought rescue at this farm, where a stable door was half open. 22-year-old Francien Coolen, an active member of the Red Cross, witnessed this event and risked her own life, crossing the line of fire to possibly do something for this man. In vain... he died in her arms. John Bruce Millar gave his life for our freedom. His final resting place was the military cemetery in Mierlo. A dramatic situation brought two young people together, just for a moment... it was September 22, 1944. The design of the memorial in Mierlo-Hout projects the facade of this farm with a half, upright stable door, (photographer unknown).



The former farm was replaced around 1970 into a "modern" BMW car showroom of Garage de Vlerk. Further on is the railway crossing and the Mierloseweg (photographer unknown).

Next to the showroom was the car garage and the gas station. In the 1990s, until 2001, the building served as a supermarket. The supermarket was demolished in 2013. F| Toon van der Putten.



The current new building now stands on the location of the farm, the car garage with gas station showroom and supermarket; "Suburban stop Mierlo-Hout". The homes were completed in March 2022 F| M. Coolen.

### **80th anniversary commemoration 1944-2024**

The first festivities have now been announced.

- September 22: 10 a.m. Liberation Service St. Lucia Church, motto "Freedom"
- September 22: 12 noon – 1.30 pm  
Liberation concert CARAT Helmond was performed by Band of Liberation
- September 22: 3:30 PM  
Commemoration at the Mierlo-Hout monument, musical enhancement Band of Liberation



For more information about our Foundation, please refer to our website:  
<https://monumentmierlohout.nl>.