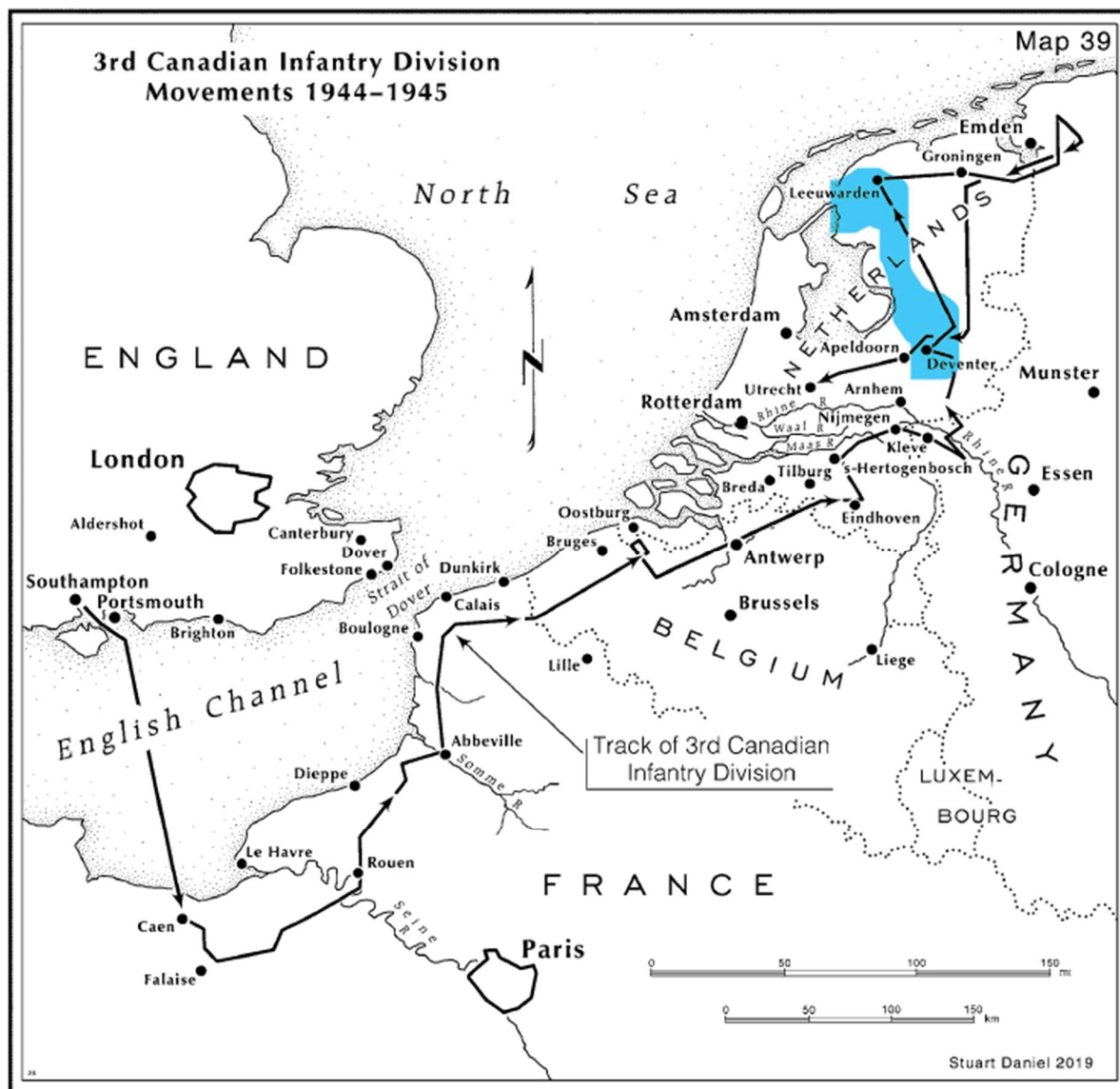


The Blue North Battlefield Tour was organized for a group of 15 participants, including a 6-month-old baby. It started and ended at the Touring Bus Terminal at the Schiphol Airport and retraced some of the route followed by the 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment (17<sup>th</sup> Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars), more commonly known as the "7<sup>th</sup> Recce", during April 1945, near the end of the Second World War. More specifically, the route ran north through the provinces of Overijssel and Friesland of the Netherlands from the 11 to the 16 April 1945.



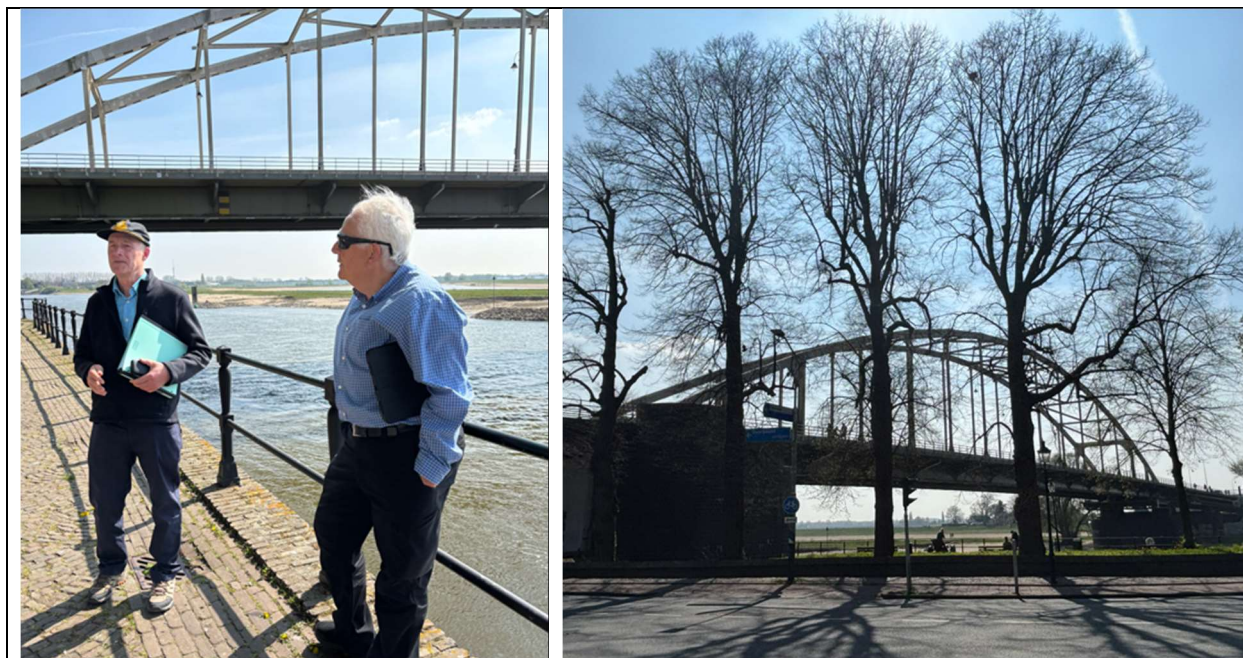
Participating in this tour were the families of two officers who had served in the 7<sup>th</sup> Recce during the liberation period. One family was comprised of Gordon and Gail Routley, the former being the son of Lieutenant George Routley who served as a troop leader in "C" Squadron, and the other was Pat and Mike Wensman, the former being the youngest daughter of Lieutenant Arthur Harris who was a troop leader in "B" Squadron. Pat and Mike were accompanied by four other members of their family. Also attending were four former members of the Royal Canadian Hussars who served in the post-war period, as well as other family members and friends.

The tour was principally organized by John Cochrane, Treasurer of the Royal Canadian Hussars Association, with the help of Edwin Meinsma, author; the historical societies of Wijhe, Kampen and Wergea; and booking agent Caroline Ripolles Bøyum of MijnVakantieCoach / Eurotripadviser.

### **Day 1 – Friday 11 April 2025 – Schiphol, Deventer and Raalte**

On Day 1, the tour got off to a rough start. The Rendezvous point was the touring bus terminal at the Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam. The participants, who arrived from multiple locations, including Montreal, Ottawa, Calgary, Maryland, Arizona, Florida and Portugal, all showed up on time, however, the chartered bus was delayed. Two groups of approximately the same size were waiting for buses in the same area. A Mercedes touring bus arrived and stopped in front of the first group. The driver, who did not speak much English, asked if they were “the Canadians” and they said “Yes,” so he loaded them on board and departed. The Blue North group saw this and expected another bus to show up shortly after. Several minutes later a small yellow school bus with big lettering “AMSTERDAM PARTY BUS.” on the side pulled up, also looking for a group of Canadians. A series of discussions and phone calls confirmed that the first driver had picked up the wrong group and had to return to the airport to exchange passengers.

The Blue North tour bus then headed east to the town of Deventer, which is the location of one of the unit’s battle honours. At Deventer, the group got off the bus and walked a short distance to the riverfront near the main bridge.



John Cochrane then gave a short presentation about the general tactical situation. During March 1945, Canadian and British forces had advanced southeast from Nijmegen into Germany. They were able to cross the Rhine River at Rees and then advance northward, re-entering the Netherlands during the first week of April. Near where the Rhine River crosses from Germany into the Netherlands, it splits into three rivers; the Waal, the Neider Rijn and the IJssel. The first two flow west toward the North Sea, while the IJssel flows toward the north. A large group of enemy troops

was still occupying the area north of the Neider Rijn and west of the IJssel. The plan was for the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Army to advance north, to the east of the IJssel, to liberate a large portion of the Netherlands and encircle the enemy troops before they could retreat into Germany. During the first week of April 1945, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division began advancing northward along the east side of the IJssel River. The German forces were prepared to make a defensive stand at the river; however, they had expected that the invasion force would be approaching from the west. They were not expecting an advance from the south on their eastern flank. This approach allowed the Canadians to move rapidly and saved many lives. The dikes on both sides of the wide IJssel River provided excellent defensive positions and there were numerous exchanges of small arms and artillery fire across the water. The City of Deventer lies on the east side of the IJssel and was heavily defended to protect the one remaining bridge across the river.

Gordon Routley then explained how the southern and eastern approaches to Deventer were protected by a maze of canals and waterways, which had to be overcome. On 7 April 1945, the 7<sup>th</sup> Recce patrols reached the Schipbeek Canal, just south of the city, but could not advance because all the bridges had been blown. Early the next morning, a crossing point was established east of the city, allowing the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigades and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade to advance around the east and north sides of Deventer. The battle for the city continued for three days, but it was finally captured on April 10. The 7<sup>th</sup> Recce accompanied the Canadian Scottish Regiment and the Royal Winnipeg Rifles as they advanced through the city street toward the IJssel River. They found that most of the enemy forces had withdrawn across the river, and the residents were anxious to welcome their liberators. The 7<sup>th</sup> Recce vehicles were able to make it all the way to the bridge, which was heavily damaged, but captured without opposition.

Gordon also explained that the bridge in Deventer was used years later during the filming of the movie “A Bridge Too Far” to represent the bridge in Arnhem. When the movie was released, it generated lively discussions in the RCH officers’ mess in Montreal, among the veterans who referred to it as “the bridge that **we** captured”.

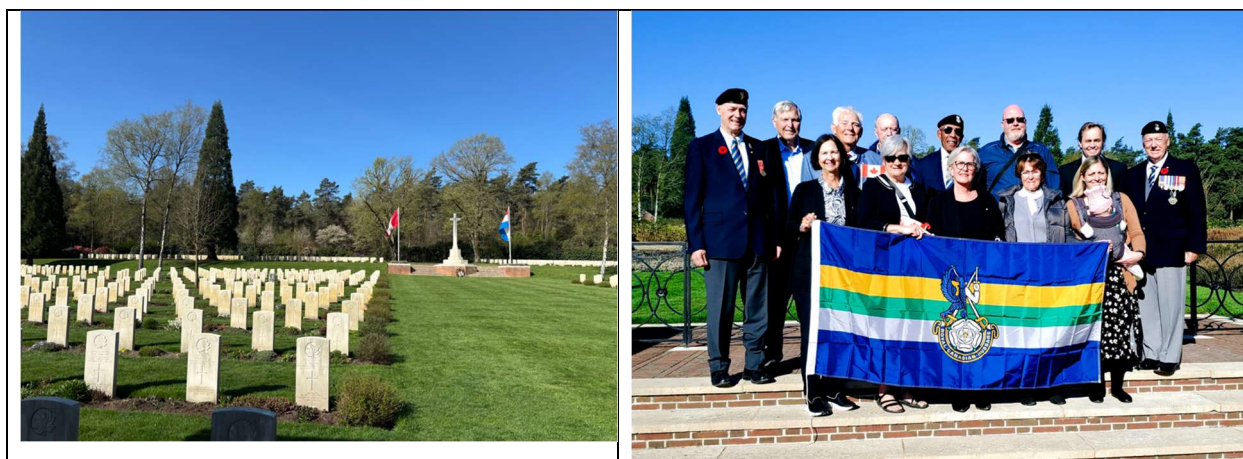
The battle for Deventer proved to be “the last determined resistance offered by the enemy” during the northward drive by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division. From there on the progress was rapid, although there were many encounters with smaller enemy forces along the way. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division was able to cross the IJssel at Deventer and advance westward toward Apeldoorn and Arnhem, while the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division continued north.

In 2025, after the tour group visited Deventer, the bus headed for the Hotel Inn Salland in Raalte, another town that was liberated by the 7<sup>th</sup> Recce. This hotel was a converted old-style farm house and connected barn. It had a covered courtyard in the centre and a patio out front. It was a bit rustic, but the beds were comfortable, and the food was first class. A briefing and introduction session was held upon arrival and group suppers were served during the two-day stay at the hotel.



### Day 2 – Saturday, April 12, 2025 – Holten and Wijhe

Day 2 started with a visit to the Holten Canadian Military Cemetery, where eleven deceased members of the unit are buried. It is a beautiful and peaceful property in the middle of a national forest. It was a glorious day. The sun was shining, the birds were singing, and from a nearby farm, a rooster was crowing. The group made its way through the cemetery placing poppies and Canadian flags at each of the eleven graves. For the purposes of the visit, each participant adopted one of the deceased soldiers and, in front of their grave, made a short presentation of the soldier's background and the circumstances of his death. All the tributes were respectful and eye-opening. Of the eleven Hussars buried there, most were killed in Germany. All of them died early in life and were deprived of the experience of raising a family. Some died accidentally and five died after the declaration of the ceasefire. Some were married and two even had children who they never saw grow up. It was a very emotional morning.



In the afternoon, the group travelled to Wijhe (pronounced 'Vaigh-ha') to visit the site where Lieutenant H.H. Anderson died on the evening of 11 April 1945. Lieutenant Anderson was one of two Lieutenants in 11 Troop, "C" Squadron, the other being Lieutenant George Routley. George's son, Gordon Routley explained that the troop had split into two patrols that were moving north along parallel roads, separated by approximately 850 metres. They were planning to meet at Cow

Road (Koeienweg), which ran east-west connecting the two roads, just south of the village of Wijhe. That meeting never occurred. Anderson's Staghound armoured car was destroyed by an anti-tank round as his patrol turned onto Cow Road. An ambush had been set-up by a contingent of approximately 40 German paratroopers. The crew bailed out and Anderson died using his pistol to provide cover for the others as they escaped to the ditches along the road. Hearing the gunfire, Routley's patrol advanced across the fields from the opposite direction to engage the Germans and rescue the remaining members of Anderson's patrol, who were all pinned down by heavy fire from the well-fortified farmhouse. Routley's patrol was successful in rescuing all the living members of Anderson's patrol, but they could not recover Anderson's body.

In 2025, the tour bus stopped in front of the Van Dam farm, where the ambush occurred. There, Hans Kamphuis, chair of the Wijhe Historical Society had assembled a reception party comprised of members of the historical society as well as others who had some connection to the event. One of the people present was the current owner of the Van Dam Farm. The farm was destroyed in the firefight after the ambush, but it was rebuilt after the war using funds provided by the Marshal plan. Today, it is a quaint little hobby farm with a stable and three horses. Another person present was the son of the town doctor who was called to the site in 1945. Also, present were members of the Hoogedoorn family, who have regularly corresponded with Anderson's mother, and after her death, with members of his extended family. After introductions were made and stories were told, the combined group walked the length of the street, which was renamed *Luitenant Andersonstraat* after the war.



The tour group then reboarded the bus and left for the centre of Wijhe to visit a small park at the corner of Orangeelaan and Stationsweg, where there is a monument that specifically commemorates Lieutenant Anderson. Plaques beside the monument also commemorate residents of the town who died during the German occupation, many of them Jews and resistance members. Gordon Routley planted a Canadian flag and poppy at the monument and made a brief tribute, then the combined group walked up the town's narrow, cobblestone main street to visit the historical society and tourist office where coffee, tea and cake were served. There, it was possible to examine albums of photos taken in 1945. Many small discussions occurred between the tour members and their hosts. The outstanding hospitality of Hans Kamphuis and the other members of the Wijhe Historical Society was greatly appreciated.



### Day 3 – Sunday, 13 April 2025 – Zwolle, Kampen and Heerenven

Day 3 started with a guided walking tour of the 1,000-year-old city of Zwolle, which was liberated from the Germans on 14 April 1945. Corporal Leo Major, a member of the Regiment de la Chaudière, entered the town the prior night on a foot patrol, and, by making a lot of noise, convinced the Germans to withdraw earlier than the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division commander had expected. Leo Major returned to his lines just before dawn to report that the Germans had withdrawn from the town during the night. At that point, a planned artillery bombardment was cancelled, thus saving the old city. However, two troops of “A” Squadron 7<sup>th</sup> Recce were the first units to enter the town the next morning, and did so amidst scenes of wild jubilation, as citizens clambered over their vehicles. The walking tour focused on the suppressed lives of the citizens during the five years of German occupation and the persecution of Jewish, resistance and other families during that time. On the sidewalks in front of the homes of the many residents who were killed during the occupation are small brass plates commemorating them.



At the end of the tour in Zwolle, around 11:00 hours, the tour group was met by Herman Broers, a journalist, and the Chair of the Historical Society of Kampen. He boarded the bus in Zwolle and guided the bus driver to Kamperzeedijk, where the group visited the William Thomson Bridge over the Veneriete Canal near Pumping Station Mastenbroek. In 2015, the bridge was named after Thomson at the initiative of 80-year-old Ab Roetman, who was born in Kamperzeedijk, but later moved to IJsselmuiden. In 1945, it was Sergeant Willaim Thomson of the 7<sup>th</sup> Recce, who was first to cross the bridge, liberating Kamperzeedijk. A member of “A” Squadron, Thomson, dismounted from his vehicle and checked if the Germans had placed explosives on the bridge. He found that the bridge was safe, but then he got into a firefight with the retreating Germans in IJsselmuiden. Then, Herman Broers guided the tour bus along some small back roads to bypass some road

construction but also so that the participants could have a closer look at the farms in the low-lying polder country (reclaimed land.)

At 13:00 hours in 2025, the tour group arrived at the former Kampen City Barracks, which date back to the 1850's, to have lunch with the members of the Kampen city council and the historical society. The Kampen Historical Society, library and city archives are also based there. It is a historically important location along the River IJssel. During the Second World War, it was a collection and transshipping point for thousands of young Dutch men who had been taken prisoner and were being sent to Germany to work as forced labourers. Upon arrival, the tour participants were warmly welcomed by Sander de Rouwe, the mayor of the town, who is also a mid-aged father of nine children. Two members of the regional fire department also warmly welcomed Gordon Routley, the recently-retired assistant director of the Montreal Fire Department.



After lunch, there was a welcoming speech by the mayor after which Herman Broers recounted the story of the liberation of Kampen by the “7<sup>th</sup> Recce.” On the 14 April 1945, “A” Squadron troops reconnoitred to the west and north of Zwolle. They found that a bridge over the IJssel River near Kampen had been blown. They came under shell fire from the other side of the river, and sniper fire from the church towers in Kampen. On 17 April 1945, hearing that the Germans had left Kampen, Lieutenant D. J. Mobberley, of No. 2 Troop, took a small boat, crewed by local citizens Warner Pap and Frans de Hosson, and with Sergeant Leon Baker and Trooper L. Lallemand, crossed the River IJssel and entered the town. When the three Hussars disembarked from the rowboat, they were met by a cheering crowd. They were followed later by other troops. After the squadron was securely established in Kampen, a victory parade was held.

After the presentations at the City Barracks, the tour group was invited to walk with the mayor, city council members, and members of the historical society through the old town to attend a commemoration service at a monument further south along the river. This monument, which is adorned with the hat badge of the 17<sup>th</sup> Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars hat badge, was unveiled in 1995. There, a troop of Dutch scouts were formed up around the monument, and numerous citizens, children and journalists were present to observe the commemoration service. First, the mayor made a speech in Dutch and in English and former Honorary-Colonel (Retired) Bernie Ciarroni responded on behalf of the group, thanking the mayor, the city council, the historical society, and the people of Kampen for their hospitality. Then, Lieutenant-Colonel (Retired) Bernie Ciarroni and Chief Warrant Officer (Retired) Clarence Layne laid a wreath in

memory of all those who had died during the war, and the Chair of the historical society and the Mayor did the same. To end the ceremony, the tour group participants sang the Canadian National Anthem and the people of Kampen responded with the National Anthem of the Netherlands. On the way back to the City Barracks, Herman Broers led the group along the river past the old Synagogue, which will soon be turned into a historical monument, as most of its members were killed by the Germans during the war. The outstanding hospitality of Mayor de Rouwe, the city council, Herman Broers, and the other members of the Kampen Historical Society was greatly appreciated.



After leaving Kampen, the bus traveled 54 kilometers north to Heerenveen and its next hotel. It was a more modern and traditional hotel, set in a quiet residential quarter of town beside a golf course. When “B” Squadron reached Heerenveen on 15 April 1945, it found that its route into town was blocked by a blown railway crossing. However, the squadron circumvented the town and sped on to Akkrum.

#### **Day 4 – Monday, 14 April 2025 - Oude Schouw, Grou to Wergea**

Day 4 of the tour started at 08:30 hours with an interesting 1.5-hour slide presentation by Edwin Meinsma, historian, and author of “Canadians in Friesland,” a book written in Dutch about the liberation of the province of Friesland by the Canadian Forces. Edwin travelled on the bus with the tour group for the rest of the day to describe the events that occurred in 1945 and answer questions.

At 10:00 hours the tour group left for Oude Schouw; the location where, in 1945, a bridge across the Nije Wjittering Canal had been blown up by the Germans to block the advance of the Canadians. Not willing to wait for the Engineers to deploy and build a replacement bridge, Sergeant George Dunlop’s patrol was able to have their four motorcycles transported across the canal by boats owned by nearby residents. Once across, they sped on, arriving in Leeuwarden at around 15:00 hours the same day. The members of the Dutch resistance organized the local population into a large construction team that removed the wreckage of the old bridge, then used barges and lumber to build a new bridge that was strong enough to support the passage of armoured cars and other heavy vehicles. When this construction was completed, later in the day, the rest of the squadron was able to cross the canal and move on to Leeuwarden.



In 2025, the tour group found that the original bridge and road is no longer being used. The canal has been widened for very large barges, and a new higher bridge has been built approximately 75 meters to the west. However, the old hotel, which can be seen in the background of pictures of Sergeant Dunlop on his motorcycle, is still there.

In 1945, while the reconstruction of the Oude Schouw bridge was a hive of activity, Lt. Arthur Harris was guided by the resistance to the small town of Grou. From there his troop's six Universal carriers were loaded onto barges and transported up the canal to Wergea. They also made their way to Leeuwarden before the end of the day.

In 2025, the tour group also went to Grou to board a beautiful 100-year-old sailing barge, called the *Halve Maan* from Akkrum. The tour group arrived around noon with their lunch packages and piled onto the large cushions on top of the open deck. Our hosts and barge owners, Richard Willart and Odet de Graaff served coffee and tea while they explained the plan for the afternoon. It was a warm, bright, and refreshing afternoon. It felt like we were all on holiday. The cruise meandered through a nature preserve, where it was possible to view all kinds of waterfowl, many beautiful blooming trees, and some cute summer homes. At one point, a trio of Roe deer swam across the canal in front of the boat and ran across the grasslands beside the Canal. They were smallest breed of deer in the Netherlands, basically the size of a large dog.



Odet then made a presentation about the history of the boat. It was originally used to transport goods from town to town. A century ago, this type of boat moved most of the goods between the coastal ports and inland cities. The owner and his family lived in the stern of the boat and the

children were home-schooled. Under the original design, there was no motor, so it was propelled by an enormous sail, or by the family pulling it as they walked along the bank. Just after the war, it was converted to a barge-racing boat, competing with other similar boats on different lakes in the northern Netherlands. Finally, the current owners converted it for tourism, for both short excursions and week-long trips.

Once the tour of the nature preserve was complete, the barge returned to Grou and then headed north on the canal leading to Wergea. It was a smooth quiet voyage. The most remarkable observation noted during the trip was how flat and open the countryside was and how vulnerable the vehicles on barges must have been as they floated up the canal. There may have been isolated pockets of Germans in the farmhouses in the area, but if there were, they chose not to fire on the vehicles.



The *Halve Maan* landed at the exact place in Wergea that Lieutenant Arthur Harris and his troop landed in 1945. He and his troop members were met at the dock by hundreds of residents celebrating the liberation before they could move on towards Leeuwarden. Harris' stay was very short, but the liberation had a profound impact on the quality of life for the residents of Wergea and the rest of the Netherlands. In 2025, the tour group was welcomed by a 20-person delegation from the local historical society and led to the community centre. The combined group stopped in front of the community centre while the members of the historical society raised the regimental flag of the Royal Canadian Hussars as a tribute to the original liberators of the town. After this, everyone entered the community centre and were treated to refreshments and a presentation by Alexander Tuinhout of the Missing Airmen Memorial Foundation. Some 500 aircraft crashed in Friesland and surrounding waters during the Second World War. The foundation has been marking crash sites where there are missing aviators to register them as potential grave sites. They also research the crews of those aircraft and document their histories for the benefit of future generations. They have placed monuments and information panels throughout the province. The lecture focused on a crash of a bomber in Warten, near Wergea, with several Canadian crew members on board.

At the end of the day, the tour group left for their next hotel, the Fletcher Paleis Stadhoudelijk Hof, in central Leeuwarden, across the street from city hall. The hotel is in a building originally built as a palace in 1564 by the rentmaster-general of the Spanish king and leader of the Court of Friesland.

Over the years, the building changed hands numerous times until, in 1996, it was converted into a hotel.

### Day 5 – Tuesday, 15 April 2025 - Leeuwarden

Day 5 began with the tour group attending the annual anniversary celebration of the liberation of the city. A key part of this ceremony was the raising of the regimental flag of the Royal Canadian Dragoons and the flag of Leeuwarden in front of the Leeuwarden city hall. This tradition commemorates the arrival of the Royal Canadian Dragoons on 15 April 1945. The Dragoons, arriving from the east, were the first Canadian unit to enter the city, and the “7<sup>th</sup> Recce,” arriving from the south, was the second. The ceremony, which was hosted by Nathalie Kramers, deputy mayor, was attended by numerous guests including two who were old enough to remember the arrival of the Canadian soldiers. It was also attended by Mr. Keith Thom of Peachland, British Columbia. He is the son of Major Murray Thom the squadron commander of the RCD squadron that first liberated the city of Leeuwarden. After the flags were raised, four wreaths were laid at the base of the flag posts, and a group of school children laid roses on the ground. All this was done to a background of old restored military vehicles.



Next, the members of the tour group were invited to the magnificent Orange Room inside the town hall to attend the official release of Edwin Meinsma’s new book. The deputy mayor, again acting as host, called the meeting to order, introduced the topic, invited four school children to read poems they had written about the liberation, then invited Edwin forward. Edwin described his book and outlined his thought process in deciding to author the book. He had read a series of letters written by his grandfather during the war years and started wondering about how his natal village of Wergea had been liberated. After many hours of research, he was able to identify Lieutenant Arthur Harris as the commander of a troop from the “7<sup>th</sup> Recce” that travelled on barges from Grou to Wergea. He contacted the Royal Canadian Hussars Association in Canada to find out more information about Lieutenant Harris. With the help of some of its members over four months, he was eventually able to contact Pat Wensman, the youngest daughter of Lieutenant Arthur Harris and hear about Arthur’s subsequent family life after the Second World War. This experience, which was very fulfilling, led Edwin to see that there was a void, in that little had been written about the history of the liberation of Friesland. He then set out to fill this void by authoring his book. At the end of his

presentation, in return for her inspiration, Edwin presented Pat Harris Wensman with the first official copy of the book. She graciously accepted the book, mentioned that it was great to hear about how her father had helped the people of the Netherlands, and thanked Edwin and the city for their wonderful hospitality.



After the ceremony, the tour group embarked on a boat ride through the canals of Leeuwarden to an old prison that was made famous by a jailbreak during the war during which the Dutch resistance, using trickery, was able to liberate 50 or so prisoners without causing a single death. In the afternoon, the tour group visited the resistance display at the Fries Museum (Frisian provincial museum).

#### **Day 6 – Wednesday, 16 April 2025**

On the last day of the tour, the tour group boarded the bus at 08:00 hours and headed for the Schiphol Airport via the Afsluitdijk Causeway. On the way, the bus stopped briefly at the Second World War monument at the Hammenspark (a small park) in Harlingen. The town of Harlingen was an important port and a possible escape route for the many thousands of German soldiers that were still in the central part of the Netherlands around Amsterdam.

At the monument, the tour group took a few moments to make a tribute to Major Charles Wesley MacLean. On 16 April, Major MacLean, commanding “B” Squadron, personally led a patrol to the outskirts of Harlingen, drawing fire on himself to determine the exact enemy positions. He did this so well that the 9th Brigade was able to assault Harlingen with the minimum of casualties. Major McLean was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) because of this action. His commendation read, in part, that he had led his squadron with “a willingness far above the normal effort.” The Harlingen action was only one among many examples of his service. “Through this officer’s unfailing efforts, drive and disregard for his own personal safety, his squadron has been able to achieve all objectives with a minimum loss of men and vehicles and the utmost information to the brigades which he was supporting.”

The infantry occupied Harlingen on 17 April 1945 and Makkum (at the east end of the causeway) on 19 April 1945. This cut-off the escape route and resulted in the capture of approximately 400,000 German troops.

#### **Conclusion**

The Blue North tour allowed participants to see the ground where events occurred eighty years earlier and hear about those events and the Second World War from the point of view of the people of the Netherlands. Those whose fathers had been involved parted with a more complete and hopefully accurate vision of events. All others appreciated gaining a better understanding. The tour was short and intense, but the reception received from the local historical societies, city councils, schools and ordinary citizens was remarkable. The people of the Netherlands really do appreciate the liberation and the soldiers who helped achieve it. The visit to the resting place of those soldiers who lost their lives was surreal and very emotional. May they rest in peace forever.