

Monteiths receive Royal Welcome from Dutch Prince

It was a very memorable trip in many ways for Wallacetown couple, Donald and Dorothea Monteith. In recalling the events of the journey, the highlight is definitely the meeting with Holland's Prince Bernhart on May 2nd.

But this wasn't the first time Mr. Monteith had been in the presence of royalty. It was more like a reunion since he had initially met the Prince shortly after the liberation of Holland by Canadian troops at the end of World War II.

Changes Birth Date

He was just 17 when he signed up to fight, despite his parents opposition. Seeing a film clip about what the Germans were doing in Poland made him resolve to join up, and by changing the date on his birth certificate from September 6th, 1923 to 1920, he was able to enlist.

After a year of training, Mr. Monteith finally headed overseas, landing in England in 1941. He received seven decorations for his part in the air defence of that country.

Radio Operator

Mr. Monteith served as a radio operator in the 1st Canadian Corps which was made



ROYAL RECEPTION — Prince Bernhart, left, welcomed Wallacetown couple Donald and Dorothea Monteith to Soestdijk Palace when they visited Holland for the 55th anniversary of V-E Day. Mr. Monteith had first met the prince shortly after World War II.

up of the 1st Infantry and 5th Armoured divisions. He was sent to Italy in 1943 where he was involved in one of the most fierce battles of the war, the Battle of the Monastery on the Mount of Monte Casino. Many lives were lost on both sides including one of Mr. Monteith's best friends. Amazingly he got away without a scratch even though he was on the front line.

He was still in Italy when the 2nd Canadian Corps landed in France on D-Day, June

6, 1944. Not long after the two corps were combined to become the 1st Canadian Army. From Italy, he was moved to France, then Belgium and then to Holland.

Liberate Holland

He fought for about two months there, being part of the Canadian forces which finally liberated Holland. He was based outside Groningen when Victory in Europe (V-E) Day was declared on May 5th, 1945. It was a few days later that the peace ac-

cord was actually signed. He finally arrived back in Canada about December 29th.

Mr. Monteith recalled how it was Canadian troops near Amsterdam that negotiated with the Germans to let truckloads of food be taken to the starving Dutch people, and where trucks couldn't go through, they dropped food from low flying airplanes.

Commemoration

The Monteith's returned to Holland on a "remembering tour," a specially organized trip to enable those who helped liberate Holland to return and be part of festivities and ceremonies commemorating V-E Day. It is estimated that between 6,000-8,000 Canadian veterans, their spouses and families, etc., attended this year.

Mr. and Mrs. Monteith also took part in the first tour organized in 1995 which marked the 50th anniversary. At that time Mr. Monteith was in two parades and commented that the people are still so grateful for what the Canadian soldiers did for them. "My hand was actually swollen from shaking hands," he said.

Never Forget

This is echoed in the brochure outlining the itinerary for the "Millennium 2000 Liberation Celebration"

where it states, "The hearts and the homes of the Dutch are opened to you to make this visit an unforgettable and enjoyable celebration. We want you to know how much we appreciate all that you have done for our liberation!" It does not matter that 55 years have passed, the Dutch people will never forget.

Royal Visit

In planning for this trip, the Monteiths had made an application to the Dutch embassy asking to be able to meet the prince. They were amazed to learn that their request would be granted. On May 2nd the couple journeyed to Soestdijk Palace for their audience with Prince Bernhart.

It was July or August of 1945 when Mr. Monteith went with a newspaper reporter from Utrecht to a rendezvous which turned out to include the prince.

Wanting to survey bombed dykes, Prince Bernhart asked Mr. Monteith if he would like to take a plane ride with him. Upon learning that the prince had not piloted a plane since before the war, Mr. Monteith turned down the offer.

It would seem that as no one else would go up with him, the prince did not take the flight after all, since in consulting his flying log in preparation for the Monteith's visit, there is no record of the 1945 flight.

"It was exciting....a real honour that he accepted the audience. Even more exciting when he puts his hand out, shakes it and wishes you well," said Mr. Monteith of his recent meeting with the prince.

Cruise the Rhine

Prior to the Liberation Celebration, the couple spent a week cruising the Rhine River. While in Holland, the Monteiths stayed with a young Dutch family with 6 children that operated a 100-head dairy herd.

The celebration included a number of special ceremonies saluting the Canadian visitors. The Monteiths were part of the planting of maple trees in several different towns meant to be a living tribute to the Canadian troops.

Visit Cemeteries

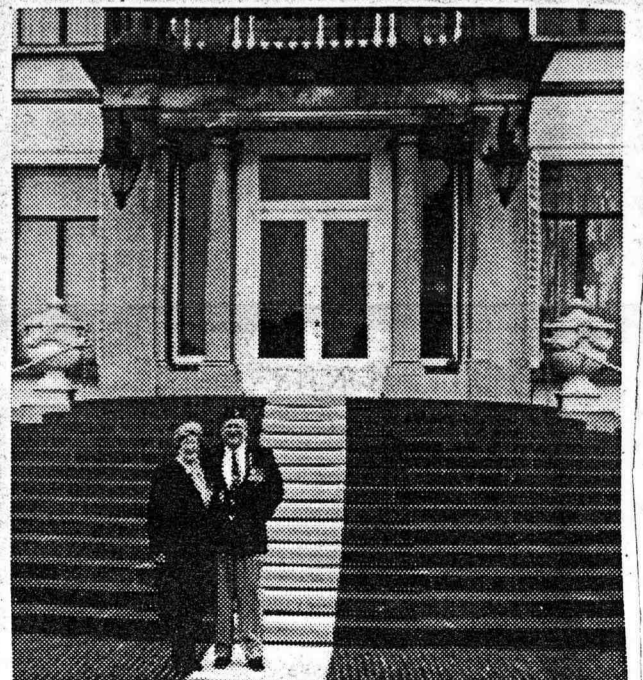
They visited the Holten and Groesbeek cemeteries and at the Oosterbeek Cemetery took photographs of the grave of Marg McKillop's then 21-year-old brother. Mrs. McKillop had never known where her brother was buried.

The couple was featured in several Dutch newspapers, thanks to their audience with Prince Bernhart and Mr. Monteith's previous encounter with him.

Born in St. Thomas, Mr. Monteith spent another 15 years in the air force after the war, initially as a radio operator and when that job was eliminated, as an air frame mechanic.



HONOURING CANADIANS — Donald Monteith helped plant a Maple tree in Genemuiden as part of Holland's Millennium 2000 Liberation Celebration.



IMPOSING BUILDING — The sheer size of the Soestdijk Palace was overwhelming according to Dorothea and Donald Monteith.



• Het echtpaar Dorothea en Donald Monteith gaat vandaag samen met Willy Roetman en Jacomien van Dijk een bezoek brengen aan paleis Soestdijk. Daar wordt het gezelschap ontvangen door Prins Bernard, die Donald Monteith in de nadagen van de oorlog in 1945 heeft ontmoet.

Foto Freddy Schinkel

May 5th 2000

The couple Dorothea and Don Monteith are going to-day together with Willy Roetman and Jacomien Van Dijk, take a visited to He Palace Soestdijk. They meet Prince Bernhard who has meet Don Monteith in 1945.