

BRIELLE A SIGNIFICANT TOWN

Ever heard of a small town called 'Brielle' in the south of The Netherlands ? Unlikely. Still Brielle has a rich history as it comes to wars through the ages. Brielle is a fortress. This can be seen on the walls, ramparts, bastions and other fortifications that surround the city. They had to protect the civilian population from attacks. Through the centuries, various invaders tried to conquer the Netherlands. Brielle has tried many ways to keep these invaders away and that is still to be seen. The times of closed city gates are now long gone and the smoke has cleared already over 70 decades now.

THE LAST BATTLE WAS WORLD-WAR II

Though it's interesting to find out what happened in Brielle in World-War II. Though there was no question of comparatively very heavy fighting, so why a special story about this fortified town you might ask yourself ? Well, first of all Brielle witnessed from very nearby the results of Hitlers decision to bomb the city of Rotterdam in the beginning of the war by the Germans to force capitulation of The Netherlands. Secondly Brielle was of interest for the Germans while being a fortified fortress near their positions to a bunkerline of 97 bunkers, built during the wartime for a possible invasion on the coast coming from the United Kingdom.

Most important bunker was the radarbunker called 'Biberbunker', the commandpost for the 'Luftwaffe' ('Wiederstandsnest 121'). Actually it was a chain of radarposts, built to detect and defend themselves to allied bombers. The 'Biberbunker' was called 'The silent killer', while by means of this this radar-installation some 2500 bombers were detected and destroyed which cost approximately about 15.000 crewmembers their lives.

BOMBING DEMANDED MANY DEAD

March 4 1943 however some 22 people were killed due to a bombing that should not have happened. Just after 10 o'clock in the morning a formation American bombers attacked places in the coastal zone in the southwest of the Netherlands. An Americam bomber was haunted by a German plane and under fire of German FLAK (Flugzeug Abwehr Kanone) and for a probably forever unknown reason it had to let go it's bombs which fell in the middle of Brielle destroying two schools and a part of the harbor. It concerned five high-explosive brisant-bombs. Besides this bombing Brielle knew a firm underground resistance who planned resistance actions and also hiding allied pilots who's planes were shot of which also quite some people were betrayed and left their lives while shot by the Germans. So we can say the small town of Brielle had its share of the war.

DEFENSE AGAINST THE OCCUPIER

Well, there definitely was something going on in Brielle, and obviously there was a firm struggle to chase, discourage, drive back and capture the established Germans in the city during the liberation. Some 70 years later it's the weekend before Brielle's 'Liberationday' (mai 6th) that makes Brielle worth while to put it into the spotlights and write about. Let us have a look at what happened last Mai 3rd when there was a heavy fight going on in the streets of Brielle ! Let's go through this 'Liberation-day' in 2015. The town-hall was occupied by German military in command. Nearby, in 'Bastion V'(Bastion five) the German soldiers had built their camp about next to the old fortress and radar-line bunkers.

People in the streets were mistrusted in the Germans because you never know what was to happen, though it seemed quit the beginning of this day, since children were playing in the street. Brielle did know executions of resistance fighters, as well as traitors. 'Take in custody' it was called when they stole food or bicycles. Still people were going outside the houses because there was rumours that The Netherlands as nation were liberated on may 5th , but still the Germans ruled the streets of Brielle. A high german commander arrived already at the town hall, as even he expected the war to be ended in hours,

not in days. There had been some planes fighting over Brielle, and uncertainty reigned. It showed that your traitor never sleeps, and suddenly German military entered a specific house, throwing some stuff out of the window of the first floor. Seconds later some 4 (?) hiding English pilots were found who had hoped to find their way to England. (Brielle is situated quite near the coast). The pilots were arrested and brought to the German headquarters. People in the street had barely recovered from the shock, as the panic started for real !

THE AMERICANS ARE COMING !

A German soldier shouted that the Americans were already in town and approaching the area of the German Headquarters. It was great alarm for the Germans and fast as lightning positions were found with some cover, weapons loaded and shouting suddenly controlled the streets. Everything happened in a flash, Americans swarmed everywhere, using their heavier weapons and vehicles. In moments the first casualties were a fact, the Germans were totally surprised after all, wounded men were screaming in pain and in fact the Germans had no chance against the overwhelming ascendancy of the Americans. In panic people screamed, heavy firing of hand- and automatic weapons ruled the streets for some half an hour. But the Americans knew their roles to overpower and disarm the Germans fairly quickly, who had stopped believing in a good outcome of the war that in fact had already been lost. The fight was fought, and Brielle was liberated at last. Fair enough for the people in the street to hang out their flags and celebrate freedom over five years of German suppression.

RE-ENACTORS MAKE IT POSSIBLE

Re-enactment means that a (mostly war) event is repeated. This may be field- or seabattles and this phenomenon already dates from the Roman times (Arena's) and complete fieldbattles such as from Napoleon's time but also battles with the Vikings. Re-enactment was and still is used as military training to show and use tactics that can be used in our modern times. In the 60's of the previous age suddenly a revival grew, so for instance elements from the American Independence War and American Civil War were acted many times. During an event the participants try to show as close as possible the time that they portray. Demonstrations are given about the use of arms, as well as complete battles. It sure is not just 'playing war', the re-enactor is concerned about the complete picture. A Napoleontic re-enactor will never wear a wristwatch, and a second world-war re-enactor will never smoke filtercigarettes.

It's a hobby that requires much, as well time as mostly cost. Of course a woman can buy or make some clothes from that time to be part of it, and if you buy an old military (Harley-Davidson) motorbike and a suit you can be playing courier. But when you want to repair and maintain a real Sherman tank or a German vehicle well yes, that may cut into your budget deeply. If you ever have the chance to visit such a re-enactors event please do. You can enjoy the act as well as the professionalism in it. Next to that it shows a good view to those who didn't live to see things in real like the young(er) generations to show them what happened and give them a proper image that others gave even their lives for our current freedom.

THE VISITING VETERANS

Four veterans of WW-II visited after being invited Brielle after being invited and witnessed the actual and real happened battle in Brielle, imaged by the many re-enactors.

Jim Martin:

Jim: It was amazing that even four veterans like me could still witness this "battle". The veterans were also publicly honored by the audience and received flowers and a lot of appreciation ! Jim 'Pee Wee' Martin has the age of 94 years. When it was clear to him that the United States could not stay neutral after the Pearl Harbour raid of Japan, and even older men (being married and having children) drafted the military he first volunteered by the Navy. Though when he heard that the submarine that he was assigned to would not sail the first coming months he joined the paratroopers of the American Army. His highlight was at June 6 1944, at 12.30 hrs he landed at 'Dropzone C' at Normandie.

He literally ran into the Germans and a fight started which lasted for 33 days ! A few months later he was part of 'Operation Market-Garden' which was to end the war very soon. But we all know that this large operation failed, as we know by the Arnheim Bridges in The Netherlands, the well-known action later on was called 'A Bridge Too Far'. Martin got hurt, recovered and was later on part of the 'Ardennes' fights and actions in Germany. By the time he arrived at 'Berchtesgaden' (Hitler's 'Eaglesnest') the German

troops surrendered and after the summer in Austria he returned to the USA. His motto of life: 'Without freedom life isn't worth living !'

Bill Knapp:

Bill was only 19 when he heard of the Japanese Empire surprise attack at the USA fleet at Pearl Harbour. Next morning Bill lifted to Detroit to list for pilot, but there was no time to train him (normally two years). He more or less felt 'on hold' , and in 1942 he listed by the American Army to serve his country after all. Being a teenager he was not so very much involved in the total picture but he wanted to help his country and was sent to Camp Shelby in Mississippi for a basic training of three months and joined then the paratroopers. 'A war changes your life' Bill says, and he doesn't want to speak about what he has experienced. Amongst others he was part of 'General Eisenhower's Honour Guard' in Frankfurt. Bill states that he had lots of trouble to pick up the common daily life by that time, the 'wounds' were too deep. Bill: 'We lived to see so many misery, and we were afraid, we were always afraid'. We did what we had to do. Still the war brought me something in return explains Bill. 'I have developed a close relationship with some of the nicest people that God has put on this earth'.

Eugene Gilbreath:

Farmer, hunter, fishing... he liked loved the countryside. Eugene was 14 when Germany invaded Poland. His father didn't agree that he would join the Navy, so Eugene signed in as volunteer by the American Army at his 18th. He joined the paratroopers, and what impressed him most was to see how his friends around him were wounded and killed in action. As a young man you grow up fast in times of war, specially when you realize that you may not live anymore the next day. In the fights he had with the Germans he was wounded himself at the end of the war, so he didn't get much of the liberation, and the capitulation of the Germans. September 19th 1945 was dismissed in the hospital and started his civil-life again by going to school and get a 'degree' in marketing. Eugene: Freedom means everything. Freedom of church, voting, choosing your own friends, a job, travelling, freedom to have a 'good life'.

Fred Leary:

Fred (a well known veteran of the 506th par 101st Airborne Division) was stationed during the war as soldier in Maida Barracks Aldershot South-east England. A day in mid-june 1944, 06.00 hrs. The officers and men of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry didn't know yet that day that 78 soldiers of the Regiment had less than three months to live and a large number were to be wounded... Fred Leary and his mates were to be dropped in Normandie to prepare the arrival of tanks so there would be enough ammunition and supplies to guarantee the tanks a fast transit. With the normal small transport setbacks we actually arrived in France fairly relaxed and we dug our trenches. The next days we posted to an open spot in the fields to have a good overview on the environment.

Tanks and trucks were prepared for use (also for driving through undeeep waters) but we engaged the war when two 'lost grenades' hit by accident our camp and did quite some evil to supplies. We serviced the vehicles of General Montgomery passing by, some 3,414 in total-which 246 or tanks ! Only June 26 Operation 'Epsom'started, the attack on the city of Caen. To go short, our relatively easy start of our participation in the war in France took a dramatic turn.By the presence of the 2nd German SS-Panzer corps which forced a delay for Montgomery. After an offensive of this German Panzer corps (which were Hitlers Elite-troops) Montgomery had to stop his battle and withdraw.

The VIII Corps had lost over 4000 men. The Cromwell tanks were no match against the modern German Tiger- and Panther tanks. The British lost here around the Battle of Caen 469 tanks in total. Fred Leary also witnessed the great debacle of the bombing of Caen (467 Lancaster and Halifax bombers) where most of the German positions were missed and instead the city was bombed and caused much damage and lives. Fred Leary's participation in the war was one of seeing so many many soldiers killed, and being grateful he lived to tell his many stories after the war. His fight ended at Zwolle in The Netherlands when Germany capitulated. His best moment of life in decades - as he told - was when he ride in a Jeep over the Normandy beaches once more, at the age of 91 !

Let us all think back to this period and never forget our history, keep on passing it through to our next generations to know that so many men and woman lost their lives for our freedom.

Let's value our freedom, in a time that many dangers seem to come closer every day.

Let's remember Mr. Winston Churchill's words:

“Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few:

