

# Keeping memories alive...

Alice van Bekkum

This could be the device of your Historical Association. For me a memory came to life in a surprising meeting at the Airborne Cemetery.

This is where the Polish soldier Czeslaw Gajewnik was reburied. The bodies of the Polish and the Canadian soldier, Harold Magnusson, were recovered in 1944 from the river Lek by two boys in Tienhoven. More about that was written in the June number of this magazine.

After a visit in mid-England my husband and I drove to Scotland last September. That's where we were expected by Bunty; the Scottish girlfriend of Gajewnik. She met him during WWII when he and his comrades were staying in training camps in order to be trained as a paratrooper. From time to time the Polish officers organized dancing nights there.

At the end of November 2006, I traced her with the help of the Historical Association of Markinch; the area where the military barracks were.

This was made possible by the letters and the personal belongings which his parents received after his death.

I was allowed to read them when his niece brought them to me. The letters were signed by 'Bunty'; later this approved to be a name of endearment.

Her real name is Mary, but she will always be Bunty to me.

That first meeting with Bunty was reported in the local newspaper. Now I met this sympathetic lady again. This also was because she sent me a newspaper clipping in July.

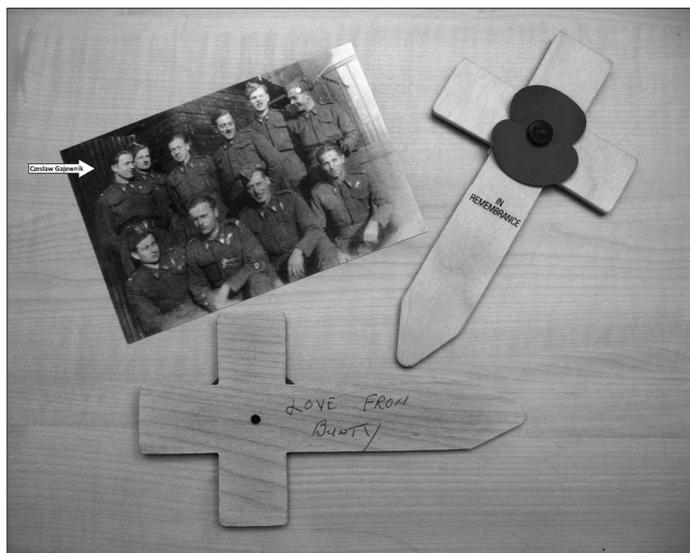
It was a quest from a 92 year old lady from ... Milsbeek (where I live).

Since 1945 this lady is taking care of a grave of a Scottish soldier at the War Cemetery in our village. You know what? This lady lives close to me; I visited her and gave her the newspaper clipping Bunty had sent to me.

Some time after that she told me that she had received a message from the place where the soldier was born. On a beautiful postcard was written: "On behalf of me and some other inhabitants of Dunscore we want you to know that we have known Harold Ewen very well. Thank you very much for your loving care of his grave. Unfortunately his parents are no longer alive; but it would have made them very happy."

I was allowed to bring Bunty a copy of this postcard and thank to her for sending the newspaper clipping on behalf of the old lady.

Bunty wrote a message on a poppy cross. I promised her to put this at the grave of Czeslaw during the commemorations of Operation Market Garden one week later. She has never been able to visit his grave.



*In Commonwealth countries the poppy is the symbol to commemorate the fallen soldiers. November 11th is Remembrance Day. People wear a poppy at their revers. That date WWI ended. The poppy grew at the battlefields where so many soldiers died. In 1915 a Canadian military doctor wrote a poem: In Flanders fields the poppies grow. First part:*

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow. Between the crosses, row on row, that mark our place; and in the sky the larks, still bravely singing, fly scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*The red of the poppy is compared to the blood of the victims. Inside the flower is black, color of mourning. In the heart you see a cross; sign of suffer and redemption.*



## Mystery solved by love letters

DEBBIE CLARKE explains how a bizarre series of coincidences has reunited a woman with love letters she wrote during the Second World War, and solved a 60-year-old mystery.

A MYSTERY has finally been solved for a former Markinch woman, following the discovery of love letters she penned more than 60

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Interview in the local newspaper Glenrothes Gazette of first visit to Bunty in 2007.

Saturday September 22nd we joined the wreath laying in Driel. This where the Polish victims, like Gajewnik, are remembered at the Polenplein (photo on the right).



After that I took part in the wreath laying at the Engineers Monument. That is the location where seven Canadian soldiers are remembered. They have died during the evacuation of Allies. Magnusson is one of them (2rd photo from top). The next day we joined the impressive remembrance service at the Airborne Cemetery in Oosterbeek (3rd photo from top).



The Polish soldiers are reburied to this cemetery. The graves are in one row, just after the entrance. The grave of Czeslaw is the first on the left.

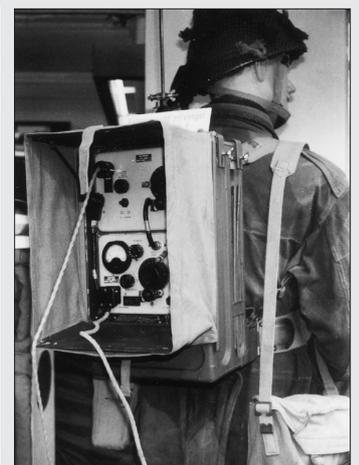
When the service had ended I walked over to the grave of Gajewnik.

Stan Opalacz also came to the grave. He was very moved and bowed over the gravestone of his comrade (photo bottom left). I had already met Stan twice before; he lives in Illinois, USA. He also was a Signalmans like Czeslaw (photo bottom right).



Later another Polish veteran in a wheelchair comes to the grave. He pointed to the gravestone of Czeslaw and says: "That was my best friend!" In a wave I told him that I had visited Czeslaw's girlfriend in Scotland last week. "Oh, Bunty?" he said "Is she still so beautiful?" You will understand I was very much impressed. How was this possible; he knows her too! He also told me that Bunty always joined her niece when they came to the dancing nights.

During these few seconds I took the poppy cross with Bunty's message out of my bag and asked him if he would be able to put this on the grave. He stood up, using two walking-sticks and he managed to bend forward and put the cross into the soil. I was happy to be able to take a picture from that action for Bunty (photo next page top left).



Jozeff Wojciechowski and Stan Opalacz were standing behind the grave of Gajewnik and many people took pictures (photo next page top right).

A regiment of young Polish Paratroopers also joined them. They wanted to have their picture taken together with Stan Opalacz. The day before, they had spoken with him for a long time (photo next page).



ne number so he could give her a call. They have been talking on the phone for a very long. A cousin of Bunty sent him the newspaper with the interview of Bunty and me.

☞ And this is how, through Jozef, the story of Bunty came to life! Again a part of the life of Czeslaw is written.

**This young man whose body was recovered in Tienhoven and who gave his life for our freedom...**

In the meantime Josef's son had helped him into the wheelchair again. I asked him for his Dad's address. And ... Jozef lives in Bradford, UK.

Within minutes the Polish veterans and their host families had to go to their coach. They were expected at a lunch with the Polish and British ambassador.

And I ... was still shaking after what happened within a short time. When we came home I immediately called Bunty to tell her what happened. And I asked her permission to give Jozef her pho-

You are most welcome to join the wreath laying (on the Saturday after September 17th).

More information:  
[www.airborne-herdenkingen.nl](http://www.airborne-herdenkingen.nl)

