

The Memorial Day I Will Never Forget

By MRS. EUGENIA J. ROSS

as told to Theodore Irwin



Mrs. Eugenia Ross

THIS WAS my first visit to Margraten. For almost 10 years I'd been saving for the trip, putting aside money each month from my salary as a salesclerk in a Richmond (Va.) department store.

Some of you may know that Margraten, near the city of Maastricht, Holland, is the resting place of more than 8,000 American boys killed during World War II in the Netherlands and nearby Germany. Each grave in the beautifully kept 65-acre cemetery is maintained by a Dutch family "to preserve the memory and perpetuate the honor" of our boys. This practice was begun after the war by the Dutch Union of Former Resistance Movement Members and has been continued ever since.

In maintaining its American grave, the Dutch family places flowers on it at Christmas, Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and the day the soldier died. Often, particularly on birthdays, American mothers and fathers wire flowers, and the Dutch families send photos of the decorated graves.

I first got the idea to visit Margraten when the van Lennep family wrote me for the date of my son George's birthday and invited me over. You see, George, who was my only child, is among the boys buried at Margraten. His grave is cared for by the family of H. L. van Lennep, who live near Amsterdam, about 100 miles away.

I flew over last year, a few days before Memorial Day, with Mrs. Netty Olivers of Castro Valley, Calif., whose son Lynn had been George's copilot. George was a bombardier with the 331st Squadron of the 8th Air Force. Returning from a volunteer daylight bombing mission over Muenster, Germany, George, Lynn, and the pilot were killed by flak on Nov. 11—Armistice Day—1943.

We were met at the Amsterdam airport by Mr. van Lennep and two representatives of the Netherlands War Graves Committee. They gave us plane tickets to Margraten. All American next-of-kin are transported free within Holland and given accommodations for a week.

A vast cemetery across the sea, a country ever-grateful towards America, and a mother who lost her son in the war make this a poignant human experience



A little Dutch girl reverently places a bouquet of flowers on one of the graves in Margraten cemetery.

At Margraten, I was escorted to my son's grave and then left discreetly alone. I felt choked up and limp. Leaning against the marble cross bearing the name, George Wilmot Ross, Jr., I thought of that morning long ago when I received the telegram informing me George was "missing."

As I looked down at my son's last haven, I shut my eyes and scenes flashed through my mind: George as a little fellow, on the first day he left for school . . . the way he played the drums in

the high-school band . . . how persuasive he was on the college debating team . . . the day he joined the Air Force . . . George dead at the age of 24.

I recall vividly how bright and clear that Memorial Day dawned. For the occasion, stands had been erected at Margraten, and hundreds of visitors, including dignitaries and diplomats, had arrived. A guard of honor was composed of former Resistance members. The Boy Scouts had placed Dutch and U.S. flags on each grave.

The touching ceremony started with the invocation by an American chaplain. A few brief words were spoken by U.S. Ambassador Philip Young and the Queen's Commissioner. Wreaths contributed by the Queen, the burgomaster of Maastricht, the American Legion, and others, were brought up and placed in a row on a pedestal. Thousands of school children laid flowers on the graves. Another chaplain gave the benediction.

Then the 3rd Armored Division Band played Taps. That moment was too much for me. A chill shot down my spine, and I broke out weeping. So did Netty Olivers beside me.

At the end of the hour-long ceremony, a Dutch band played their national anthem and ours. We were so filled with emotion we couldn't speak.

AFTERWARD, I walked among the graves, noticing the bouquets and wreaths wired by relatives who couldn't be present. It reminded me of the time George sent me an azalea plant on Mother's Day when he was at an Army camp near Spokane, Wash. I planted it in our back yard, and it still flowers each spring. That azalea is like a memorial to my son. Tomorrow, in return, I am wiring flowers to George for this year's Memorial Day.

I can hardly believe it was just a year ago tomorrow that I spent Memorial Day at my son's grave. The simple but impressive "Remembrance Ceremony" conducted by the wonderful Dutch people that day will always be indelibly engraved on my mind.

I remember how comforted I felt that George was resting in a place like Margraten. And I remember how, in the lovely chapel, I sat in silent prayer, thankful that I could visit his grave. For me, it was the truest of Memorial Days.

COVER:

Photographer Ozzie Sweet went in search of a second Miss Somebody for our series of "unknown" cover girls and discovered **rebecca Percy**, 17, of Waco, Texas. You'll meet this vivacious girl on p. 14.

Family Weekly

May 29, 1960

LEONARD S. DAVIDOW President and Publisher
WALTER C. DREYFUS Vice President
PATRICK E. O'ROURKE Advertising Director

Send all advertising communications to
Family Weekly, 153 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.
Address all communications about editorial features to
Family Weekly, 60 E. 56th St., New York 22, N. Y.

Board of Editors

ERNEST V. HEYN Editor-in-Chief
BEN KARTMAN Executive Editor
ROBERT FITZGIBBON Managing Editor
MARGARET BELL Feature Editor
PHILLIP DYKSTRA Art Director
MELANIE DE PROFT Food Editor

Bob Driscoll, Irma Heidman, John Hochmann, Jerry Klein,
Harold London, Jack Ryan, Peer Oppenheimer, Hollywood.

© 1960, FAMILY WEEKLY MAGAZINE, INC., 153 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 1, Ill. All rights reserved.