

The Dutch Interpreters Serving the Allied forces from 1944 until 1948 Corps of Interpreters

A. Introduction

Corps of Interpreters

The Corps of Interpreters was established as a part of the Royal Netherlands Army on October 17, 1944, by Royal Decree of November 11, 1944. One of the initiators was H.R.H. Prince Bernhard in his capacity as Commander of the Domestic Armed Forces (BNS). The command was twofold, because the corps fell under two types of commanders, namely those in London (the British High Command) and those in Brussels (Headquarters Domestic Forces).

The interpreting organization was established under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel A.A. Winter in Eindhoven, who was into hiding in the Philips factories. Shortly after the liberation of Eindhoven on September 18, 1944, he was given the general assignment, in the rank of lieutenant, to recruit and give military training to civil society interpreters. This recruitment started with potential war volunteers eager to do their part. They were obliged to have a voluntary engagement act that included the obligation to remain with the Allied divisions for up to six months after the cessation of hostilities in Western Europe. Winter was personally involved in the selection of candidates at the various offices in the liberated Southern provinces of the Netherlands. He was assisted by Major Dr. J.H.J. Willems who was a civil examiner. Before he started working, Major Willems worked as an English teacher. After taking up his duties, he was appointed first commander of the Corps. Winter remained involved in interpreting information until April 5, 1945, and was assigned to Prince Bernhard's Staff. Maj. Willems was succeeded by Major J. van der Velden, later succeeded by A.J.R. Robbers.

Interpreters were often highly trained young men between the ages of 21 and 23, many of them had previously been active in the Resistance. After a medical examination and a background check, they were assigned to the various allied units that took part in Europe in the final battle against Nazi Germany. The need for interpreters was great, so great that the commander of the 30th British Army Corps ordered the commander of the (Royal Dutch Army) Princess Irene Brigade to provide him with a number of men from his brigade as interpreters. The Corps of Interpreters took a separate place in the Dutch Armed Forces, because it was a unit without being a unit. Interpreters were given military status, even though they were de facto not military. Although the Corps of Interpretation was not a combat unit, it made a significant contribution to the course of the battle at the end of the Second World War.

The work of the interpreters was multifaceted, although knowledge of languages was central, the interpreters also often performed many ancillary tasks that fell into a belligerent army. They served as drivers, interrogated prisoners of war, arrested Nazis, assisted in wounded transport, helped liberate concentration camps and prisoner of war camps, appointed Mayors, mediated between civilians and military, seized houses, helped with billeting and performed police services. In some cases, they also fought as a paratrooper, as an infantryman, or as part of a tank crew. They were often deployed ad hoc with various army units. Of the nine hundred members of the Corps in May 1945, four were killed in combat, and dozens were lightly and some seriously injured. At the end of 1947, 141 Dutch interpreters (and liaison officers) were still employed by the British Rhine Army and two by the Americans.

The Netherlands gained a lot of appreciation from the Allies through the war interpreters. Dozens of interpreters have received high allied awards for their bravery and cooperation. The Corps of Interpreters was dissolved on May 1, 1948, when it had already been transferred to the administration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

On April 12, 1947, the Association of Former Members of the Corps Interpreters of the Royal Army was established. The motive for the establishment was very practical, namely the arrears of wages that were still owed. The slow payment was due to the complex organizational structure of the Corps that existed between 1944-1948, divided between both London and Brussels. Another motivation for the foundation was to maintain the mutual bond and to exchange war experiences. The Lustrum celebrations generally took place in 's-Hertogenbosch.

The N.M.I.H collection (The National Military Historical Museum)

The collection was donated to the Netherlands Institute for Military History (NIMH) in 2006 by former interpreter sergeant K.B.M. Brekelmans on behalf of the Association of Former Members of the Corps Interpreters of the Royal Netherlands Army.

All documents come from the archive of the association. It consists of correspondence, personal data of former members of the Corps, association minutes, documents concerning anniversary celebrations and documentation such as brochures and newspaper and magazine articles about the history of the Corps. Copies of a large number of documents from the Ministry of Defense Archives: Corps Interpreters of the Royal Army, 1944-1948 from the National Archives in The Hague are enclosed as documentation.

The term of the collection spans the years 1944 - 2001. The collection is open to the public.

All available documents are in Dutch and NOT digitalized.

They can be consulted in the museum's reading room

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Visitors are requested to produce an I.D., driver's license or passport, as the Museum is on a military complex

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