

# Reflecting on 80 Years of Freedom and Liberation

Dear Friends, Supporters, and Relatives,

This September marked a powerful milestone as Stichting Erfgoed 40-45, in partnership with local communities, honored the 80th anniversary of Valkenswaard's liberation. Our events attracted thousands, from schoolchildren discovering the past to British relatives paying respects to their ancestors, many for the first time. This edition of our newsletter captures the essence of those moments—of commemoration, connection, and remembrance.

Since October 2023, our volunteers, dedicated countless hours to planning these commemorations. We collaborated with local organizations to create a program that brought both solemnity and celebration to this historic anniversary. In this newsletter, we reflect on each part of this remarkable journey, extending our gratitude to all who joined us.



## The Peacemakers Concert: A Reflective Tribute

On the evening of September 14th, The Peacemakers concert by the Royal Mixed Singing Society "De Volharding" took place at De Hofnar. This powerful performance offered relatives and locals alike a moment of contemplation, setting a reflective tone for the days ahead. Katie Ryan and Spencer Seaton, relatives of two of the fallen soldiers buried at Valkenswaard War Cemetery and guest speakers at the event, gave heartfelt speeches, adding a personal touch to the evening's proceedings.

The concert served as a poignant tribute to the fallen and underscored the importance of remembering the past to build a more peaceful future.

## The Freedom Concert: A Joyous Celebration

The evening of September 17th saw the Markt Square transformed into a stage for the Freedom Concert, a musical celebration of unity and resilience. More than 90 musicians from local orchestras performed alongside 15 singers, offering selections that spanned the emotional journey from wartime hardship to the joy of liberation. The concert began with reflective, somber pieces, then transitioned into

lively, hopeful melodies, capturing the essence of freedom. British guests were given VIP seating for this remarkable event, which concluded with a standing ovation from an audience deeply moved by the performance.



## A Floral Tribute: The Valkenswaard Flower Parade



On September 15th, the annual flower parade took on special significance as 13 large floats and 10 smaller ones, adorned with over 2.5 million dahlias, paraded through Valkenswaard's streets. Thousands of locals and visitors gathered to see this stunning tribute, accompanied by live music and harmony orchestras, bringing a festive atmosphere to the weekend.

British relatives, invited to the event by Stichting Erfgoed 40-45, enjoyed reserved seating, allowing them to witness this beautiful tradition up close. This colorful, lively event was a powerful tribute to the theme of freedom and a reminder of the resilience of the human spirit.





## Special Reception for British Relatives

September 16th marked an unforgettable gathering at De Hofnar, where over 120 British and Irish relatives were warmly welcomed. The venue was decorated with British, Dutch, and Foundation flags, and guests enjoyed a buffet accompanied by live jazz music from the Falcon Town Jazz Band.

Burgemeester Ederveen of Valkenswaard and Burgemeester Oosterveer of Waalre shared their reflections, followed by the presentation of a special commemorative coin designed by Stichting Erfgoed 40-45, given to each guest. The first coin was presented to Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Irwin-Clark of the Irish Guards. We were deeply moved by Alison Bushnell's donation of a silver teapot made by her family member, G.H. Carroll, who lost his life on September 17, 1944. The evening fostered connections and strengthened ties among attendees, fulfilling our mission of remembrance

## Ceremony at the British War Cemetery

On September 17th, our most solemn ceremony took place at the British War Cemetery on Luikerweg.

Organized by the Bond van Wapenbroeders, the ceremony was attended by hundreds, including schoolchildren, local residents, and British relatives who laid flowers in honor of the fallen. The Kinderburgemeester, Billy de Wit, spoke on behalf of Valkenswaard's youth, while clergy from the local Catholic church offered a blessing and prayers for peace.

A highlight of the ceremony was a heartfelt speech by Simon Williams, a relative of J. Desmond, one of the soldiers laid to rest at Valkenswaard. His moving words brought to life the courage and sacrifice of his family

member, resonating deeply with all in attendance and underscoring the personal connections that make these commemorations so meaningful. Each grave was adorned with a dahlia, thanks to the Bloemencorso organization, creating a powerful visual tribute. For the first time, adoptive families met the relatives of the soldiers they honor, forging bonds that bridged countries and generations.

## "Look what I've got" - Sharing Stories and Artifacts

On September 18th and 19th, the Pop-Up Museum hosted a unique event titled "Kijk eens wat ik heb" (Look What I've Got), inspired by the popular Dutch TV show "Tussen Kunst en Kitsch". Locals brought their own war-era artifacts, documents, and family stories, sharing memories that had been tucked away for decades. Each item sparked conversations between families, volunteers, and even television crews from VOS (Valkenswaard's Broadcasting Foundation), who recorded the sessions. These contributions will be documented as part of our growing archive, preserving Valkenswaard's history for future generations. ●



Wendy and Jos put in a lot of work to capture everything on camera for VOS. The final result can be found here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=nb6GbQ62j04](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nb6GbQ62j04)

Stichting Erfgoed 40-45, gemeenten Valkenswaard en Waalre

## Unveiling of a Bench

If you have been following our newsletter, you know that our foundation has been working for quite some time on placing a memorial bench at the cemetery. On September 14th, it finally happened: that morning, the mayor officially unveiled the bench.

The bench has been placed to the left of the main entrance of the military cemetery. A plaque is attached to the bench with the text: We will remember them. It also features silhouettes of soldiers marching over the bridge at Lommel toward Valkenswaard. The plaque includes a QR code that directs visitors to our website, where they can find more information about the soldiers buried at the cemetery.

The foundation hopes that many people will make use of the bench, helping to further raise awareness of the cemetery. ●



## Special Readings During Remembrance and Concert

During the concert by De Volharding, the ceremony at the cemetery, and the celebration evening for the families of the fallen, various texts were recited by family members of those who lost their lives. We would like to share these powerful words with you.

We hope these tributes reflect the profound connection and respect that were so deeply felt during these moments of remembrance.

*Michael Dee was an Irish man, born on the 14th November 1912 to Paddy and Mary Dee of Mountcollins, Co. Limerick.*

*He was their eldest child and only son. He had 2 sisters - Julia and Ita. Ita died aged 3. Julia lived into her 88th year. The relatives of Michael Dee here today are the children and grandchildren of Julia Dee.*



*Michael was a bright young man who loved to learn and remained in school until he was 17 years old. This would have been quite rare in rural Ireland in the 1920's. He loved learning and would walk for miles to neighbours houses to get his hands on new reading material.*

*He was raised on a small farm that reared cows and pigs. Michael did not like farming. Life in rural Ireland was difficult and people were poor. He wanted a better life so he travelled to London, England probably in the late 1920's/early 1930's and joined the fire brigade there. He loved his work and was proud to be a firefighter. He wrote to his family to tell them of his success and also sent money home to support his family.*

*He joined the British Army, date unknown, from research at some point between Oct 1941 and June 1944 and was a member of the 3rd Battalion of the Irish Guards. He sent letters and postcards home to his family from Europe after the war*

*broke out. These were kept for many years until they were lost over time.*

*Michael died on the 17th September 1944, the day of Operation Market Garden. His body was found close to Valkenswaard. His service number was 2723677. The news of his death was received by his father, Paddy, via telegram. On hearing the news Paddy Dee suffered a heart attack, his heart literally broke. He grieved the loss of his son with a heavy heart until he died in 1955. He frequently sang a song called "My only son was killed in Dublin". A melancholic tribute to his beloved son.*

*The death of Michael Dee brought a profound sadness on his family. It left them broken hearted for their son and brother. The Irish Republic did not commemorate the lives of those brave Irish men who had joined the Allied Forces in the Second World War so as the years passed Michael was spoken of less but was never forgotten by his family. We are very proud to be his descendants.*

*Katie Ryan - Grand niece of Michael Dee.*

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

*Thank you for inviting me here today. It is a great honour and privilege to be here. I feel immensely proud of my grandfather, Joseph Seaton, who is buried in Valkenswaard War Cemetery. He was a young man, just 29 years old, with two sons aged 5 and 3, and he had grown up in London. He was killed on the 22nd of September 1944 while helping to clear a nearby village of enemy troops. It is incredibly moving to be here, knowing this is where he found his final resting place.*

*I have been visiting Valkenswaard and Valkenswaard War Cemetery since I was a child, almost 60 years ago now. One of my earliest memories is visiting with my father and meeting a local family who cared for my grandfather's grave. Their kindness and respect left a lasting impression on me, and it feels as if those memories were made only yesterday. I also distinctly remember attending a funfair in the town square with my brother and riding the carousel together. These are cherished memories that have connected me to this place ever since.*

*Before the war, my grandfather, Joseph Seaton, worked on the railways in Poplar, in London's East End. He was not just a soldier, but a husband and father, who left behind a young family. He died on the road between Casteren and Netersel, after his regiment, the Welch, was attacked during a river crossing. Although he died far from home, I cannot imagine a more beautiful place for him to rest than here, in Valkenswaard, cared for by such kind-hearted people. The kindness I first experienced as a child continues to this day, and I know my grandfather could not be in better hands.*

*On behalf of myself and my family, I would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the people of Valkenswaard. Your ongoing care for this special resting place, and your dedication to preserving the memory of the brave soldiers buried here, means more to us than words can express. Because of your efforts, their sacrifices will never be forgotten, and for that, we are eternally grateful.*

*Thank you.*

*Spencer Seaton - Grandson of Joseph Seaton*





*The 53 rd Welsh Division were amongst the last to land in France after D-Day. They first took part in fighting during Operation Bluecoat and the advance towards Falaise. Once the German line had broken in Normandy, the speed of advance across France toward Belgium is reflected in the day after day listing of place names in the battalion diary. The fighting was fierce and the pace relentless.*

*The 2 Mons Battalion crossed into Belgium on 7 September 1944, and on 9 September relieved the 11 Armoured Division at Antwerp. From here, the battalion moved to the Meuse-Escaut Canal and the advance on Voorheide, Arendonk, on 24 September 1944.*

*4077666 Private Joseph Desmond, 2 Monmouthshire Battalion - my uncle – was the son of Jeremiah and Roseanna Desmond. He was one of eight children. Two of his brothers, Marshal and Jim, also served during the Second World War: Marshal in the Royal Artillery, and Jim, in the Royal Navy. His other siblings remained at home: John, Elsie, Veronica (my mother), Rosie and Barbara.*

*Before the war, Joseph had worked in the coalmines and factories of the Welsh Valleys. He was also a member of the Territorial Army – A Company, 2 Mons being based in Cwmbrân and Pontypool. Joseph, mobilised with the battalion on 1 September 1939, and spent most of the war in Northern Ireland and England, garrisoning and training ready for the liberation of Europe.*

*Mum tells me her brother had a wicked sense of humour and enjoyed sport – he represented the battalion at football and boxing. The last time she saw her brother was in October 1942, when he came home to marry his fiancée, Martha Barrow. Soon after, Martha became pregnant and gave birth to their son, Jeffrey – Joseph would never meet his son.*

*Joseph was killed during the battle that liberated Arendonk, 24/25 September 1944. He was buried there and reinterred at Valkenswaard once the new cemetery was commissioned. We understand news of Joseph's death was brought to the Desmond household by members of Thomas Wheeler's family – Martha, now Joseph's next of kin, lived in Middlesbrough, North-East England.*

*Mum always remembers Corporal Wheeler in the telling of Joseph's story too. Mum says my grandmother, Roseanna, and Martha, Joseph's widow, visited the cemetery soon after the war ended. Mum believes they stayed with the family who had sponsored Joseph's grave. She regularly tells me of the wonderful hospitality they received, the meals they shared, and the care they took making sure the graveside was beautifully maintained. She is forever grateful for this. Raimondo Bogaars informed me that the van Tongeren family sponsored Joseph's grave after the war. Perhaps these were the family who so lovingly welcomed my grandmother into their home.*

*The work of the Adoption Program is inspiring. Mum has kept a photograph of Joseph on her dressing table for as long as I can remember – ever since the war, probably. The work done here lets her know the memory of her brother, the memories of all these men, is not forgotten. I, and my family, remain grateful for the demonstration of community and compassion shown in the continued sponsoring of the graves in the cemetery.*

*This program, and the work of local historians in keeping the stories of these men alive, is humbling and so important. I am immensely proud of the actions of the 2 Mons across 24/25 September 1944, and I feel immensely privileged to now be part of this group and to know my uncle is such kind and compassionate care.*

*Simon Williams*

*Nephew – Joseph Desmond*



*My name is Alison & I am here with my husband, Paul. My uncle, Cpl George Henry Carroll, is buried in the Valkenswaard War Cemetery & I would like to share his story with you.*

*George was born in 1917. His father, also named George, was Irish; he left Ireland, looking for work, & in Wales he met a young lady, Florence, who was in service there. They courted, married, & moved to London, where there were more jobs. They lived in Bethnal Green in the East End of London, moving to Hackney, also in the East End, after the war.*

*The East End then was extremely run down, it's inhabitants were very poor, & life was very hard. Their son George was the first of their six children. His siblings were: Patrick, John, Mary, Albert & David – Albert was my Dad.*

*My Dad said that he always looked up to George because he was clever, level-headed, conscientious & took responsibilities seriously. When George left school – which would have been at a much younger age than happens now – he became an apprentice silversmith. He worked hard & learnt skills quickly. We have one item that George made during this time, a typically English thing – a teapot. The hallmarks on the teapot show that it was made in London in 1933, so George would have been 16 years old when he made it.*

*Before war broke out, George had become engaged to be married. Sadly, we know nothing of the girl he was engaged to, as my Dad could never remember, being 13 years younger than George. In 1939, George & his brother Patrick responded to the call & joined up. Initially George was with the Royal Berkshire regiment, which was sent to France. However, in 1940, they had to be evacuated, along with many others, from Dunkirk.*

*By 1943, George had been transferred to the 2nd battalion The Devonshire Regiment & was now a Corporal. The Regiment served in Sicily & Italy until 1944, when they returned to England to prepare for Operation Overlord – D day. On 6th June 1944, George crossed the channel & landed on Gold beach with the Battalion. They moved into France, liberating towns & villages. George was involved in Operation Market Garden: My Dad insisted that he was among the troops transported by air, who parachuted in to join the operation. We are researching more into this at the present time.*

*On the 17th September 1944, George died. The Ministry of Defence in London told his parents that he was killed by a sniper whilst crossing an open area of land, close to some woodlands. Florence never came to terms with this loss, compounded as it was by the loss of her second son, Patrick, also. Patrick, aged 22 years, had been killed in Normandy on 5th August 1944, just six weeks before George. Consequently our grandmother would not talk to us much about them, always referring to them as "the boys" & stopping any conversations.*

*The two brothers exchanged occasional letters during the war & had become very close, due to their shared experiences. George had been informed of his brother's death; in his last letter home, George wrote that he had been "saddened to hear about Patrick" & asked how Florence, George Snr & the family were coping. A letter from George's CO to his parents after his death stated that George had always been concerned about his comrades & had applied himself completely to whatever he was commanded to do. George Snr & Florence visited George's grave here in 1948, & met the family who were then caring for it. In 1951 my parents, Albert & Ivy, married & spent their week-long honeymoon in Valkenswaard, staying with the family who looked after the grave.*

*Paul & I, along with two of our children, visited it 13 years ago. We, along with my brothers & sisters & their families, are very grateful for, & humbled by, the honour & respect given by the people of Valkenswaard, past & present, to all the brave young men buried in the war cemetery. We speak of & remember George & Patrick with gratitude, respect & awe for what they did. All these years later there is no-one living who knew or met George, but we will continue to research to find out as much as we can about those brave young men, our uncles, & endeavour to live our lives in ways that would make them proud.*

*Thank you.*

*Alison Bushell - Niece George Harry Carroll*



*Stichting Erfgoed 40-45, gemeenten Valkenswaard en Waalre*

## Reconciliation Between Valkenswaard and Oberndorf am Neckar

The name Oberndorf am Neckar frequently appears in our newsletters. This German town, where many people from our region were deployed for forced labor (Arbeitseinsatz) during the war years, is closely connected to Valkenswaard and Waalre through history.

In recent months, our foundation has conducted extensive research into the stories of people from Valkenswaard and Waalre who worked there during the war. This effort has uncovered a wealth of new information, bringing our region's history to life in new ways.

This year, we made an additional effort to take a meaningful step toward reconciliation: we invited the mayor of Oberndorf to the commemoration of 80 years of freedom. It was a historic moment on September 14, when, for



*Coat of arms of Oberndorf.*

the first time in Valkenswaard, a German flag was raised during a commemoration at the Resistance Fighters' Square. The German mayor also delivered a speech, marking a symbolic step toward unity.

With this gesture, we look confidently toward a future where the connection between our communities can continue to grow.

Do you have information for our Arbeitseinsatz working group? We would love to hear from you! Please contact the foundation and help us further map this chapter of history. ●



## New Donations



*The family handed over the silver teapot made by G.H. Carroll to the foundation.*

kept the teapot as a cherished memento of “The Boys” and decided to donate it to our foundation, bringing it closer to Carroll’s final resting place. The official transfer took place during the commemoration evening for relatives on September 16th at De Hofnar, Valkenswaard. We also received new photos of Carroll.

In addition, our foundation received a gas mask from the mobilization period, complete with a filter and storage box, which belonged to Valkenswaard doctor Dr. Woerdeman. At that time, all doctors were equipped with such masks. We also added a few small notebooks from the Eindhoven Air Raid Protection Service to our collection, which contain valuable notes that will be further investigated.

Through the family, we also received a number of personal items from veteran Tom Twite, who was an honorary guest at the 70th and 75th liberation celebrations. His veteran’s jacket and ties are now in our possession as a tribute to his memory.

Other remarkable additions include documents, photos, and a diary from individuals who worked during the Arbeitseinsatz at the Mauser factories in Oberndorf. These materials provide valuable insights into the well-known stories of this period. After a visit to Valkenswaard, the mayor of Oberndorf gifted us a beautiful book about his town, which will further enrich our research.

We also received a special book of postcards from the family of Private Lawler, who is buried at the military cemetery in Valkenswaard. These postcards were sent home by Lawler’s father from the front lines during World War I.

Since the founding of our foundation, we have been honored with generous donations from engaged individuals. In recent months, we have once again received a number of special items, which are now being carefully studied, documented, and archived.

One of the most impressive acquisitions is a silver teapot, made by Corporal G.H. Carroll, who is buried at the military cemetery in Valkenswaard. Carroll crafted this teapot during his apprenticeship as a silversmith, prior to the war. Both he and his brother lost their lives during the war. The family



*The gas mask of Dr. Woerdeman.*



*Various documents from Mr. Cox, Van Gerven, and Daamen related to the Arbeitseinsatz in Oberndorf.*



*Pendant from the estate of Mrs. Miep Scholten.*



*Various documents from Mr. De Brouwer related to the distribution office and the Interior Forces (Binnenlandse Strijdkrachten).*

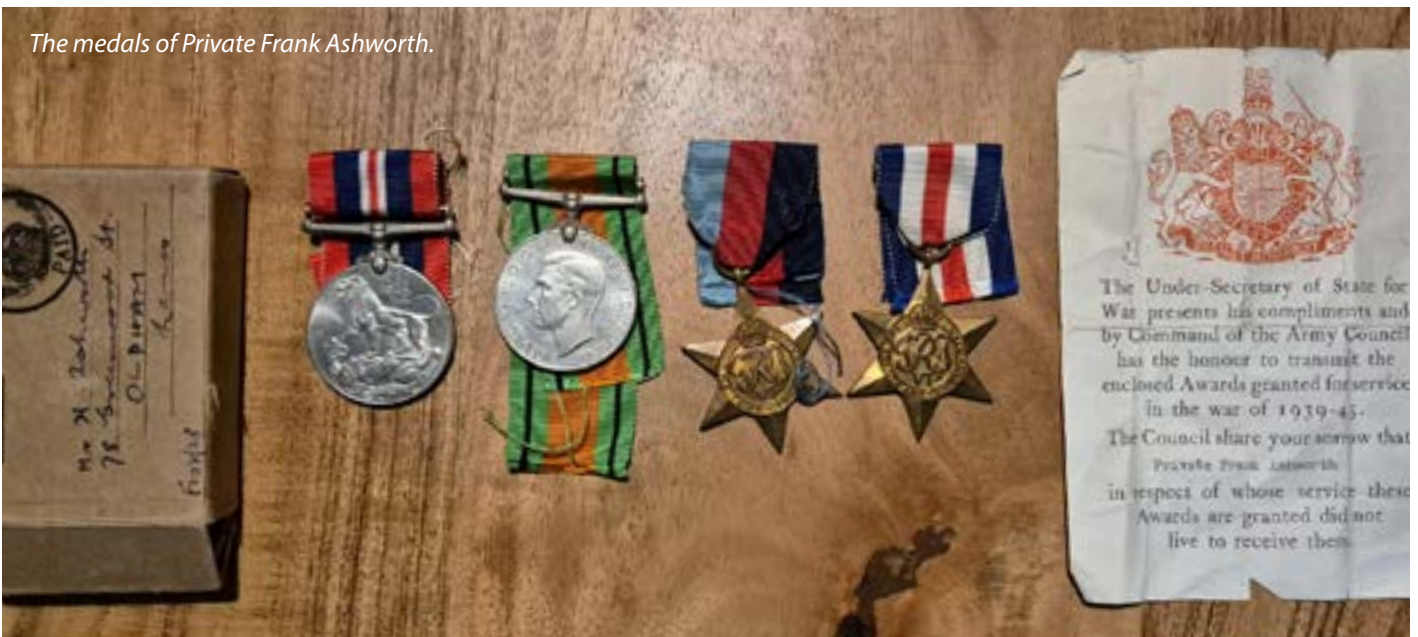
As a supplement to the diaries of Miep Scholten, which we previously wrote about, we have received an original wall tile from the house where she recorded her memories. This tile, which is also mentioned in her diaries, forms a special link to the past. Additionally, we received a silver pendant with a swastika, a unique memento from that period.

Finally, we have received various wartime documents and personal letters from Valkenswaard residents. This includes several forms from Mr. De Brouwer, who worked at the distribution office during the war. One of the letters, signed by Prince Bernhard, was addressed to the Interior Forces (Binnenlandse Strijdkrachten).

In line with our policy, some post-war military items related to the Limburgse Jagers regiment will be passed on to the Limburgse Jagers museum.

Although it is not a donation, we would still like to share that the foundation was recently able to acquire the medals of Frank Ashworth through an auction site. Frank Ashworth is buried at the military cemetery in Valkenswaard. These medals have now been carefully added to our archive and are a valuable addition to our collection.

We hope to present these remarkable acquisitions on our website soon and would like to sincerely thank our donors for their valuable contributions. ●



*The medals of Private Frank Ashworth.*

# Looking Ahead: Christmas Eve and the Future of Our Adoption Program

Our foundation is dedicated to giving a face to every fallen soldier at the British cemetery in Valkenswaard. Through our War Cemetery Adoption Program, local residents adopt a grave and lay flowers on important days. This program also fosters relationships with British relatives, who assist us in our search for photos and additional information. In this way, each grave becomes more than just a stone—it becomes a lasting reminder of a life and a story that continues to be shared.

This year, on Christmas Eve at 4:30 PM, we will again place candles on all the graves. We warmly invite adopters and other interested individuals to join us. If possible, please bring a lighter to help light the candles. Together, we will create a meaningful commemoration during the holiday season.

Additionally, we plan to organize our first adopter's evening in early 2025. This evening will focus on sharing information from the foundation and provide an opportunity for questions, ideas, and feedback. Once the exact date and location are confirmed, adoptees will receive an invitation. We hope to hold this event in January 2025. ●



# Looking Back with Gratitude and Looking Forward with Determination

As we conclude this special edition of our newsletter, we would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone for their support. Through donations, volunteer hours, and your presence, we have been able to make these commemorations a success. We will continue working on our educational programs, historical research, and preservation projects, ensuring that the history of Valkenswaard during World War II remains a source of inspiration and remembrance.

For further updates and ways to support our work, you can follow us on Facebook or visit our website.

With sincere thanks and appreciation,  
Stichting Erfgoed 40-45, gemeenten Valkenswaard en Waalre ●

# Books, Posters en Merchandise



Support the Foundation!

In addition to our special posters, which were designed for the festivities, there are many more unique items available to support our foundation. The posters are available in A3 (€10) and A4 (€5) sizes, serving as a beautiful reminder of this festive period. We also offer a wide range of merchandise, including stickers, magnetic stickers, keychains, and flags. Soon, you will be able to find these products on our website.

Additionally, the books "Het donderde in de lucht" and "The Road To Valkenswaard" are still available. "Het donderde in de lucht" explores the local wartime history of the air war and its impact on our community, while "The Road To Valkenswaard" focuses on the liberation and the personal stories behind these historic events. Both books are highly recommended for those who feel connected to our history.

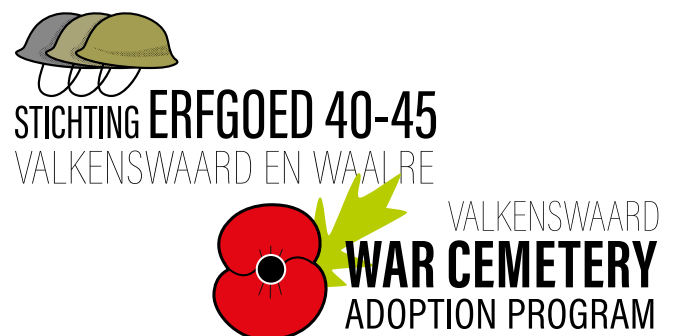
Interested? Feel free to contact the foundation or order soon through our website. With each purchase, you contribute to the preservation of our heritage and the work of the foundation. ●

## Your Help

The Erfgoed 40-45 Foundation, along with the municipalities of Waalre and Valkenswaard, is a non-profit organization. This means that all income is used to support the goals the foundation strives for. These include the costs associated with running the foundation (bank fees, website, postage, etc.), research into the graves, education for the local youth, providing a cup of coffee for family members who come from all over the world to visit the graves, and many other related activities.

To cover these costs, we are always looking for sponsors or donations. If you would like to sponsor the foundation, please contact us. We can also discuss any potential benefits, such as an advertisement in our newsletter or on our website, a banner at an event, etc. Furthermore, we are always looking for stories, photos, artifacts, etc., related to World War II. If you have something, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us.

We thank you in advance for your support! ●



**VWCAP is a part of the Erfgoed 40-45 Foundation, in collaboration with the municipalities of Valkenswaard and Waalre.**

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**IBAN number: NL 27 RABO 01.16.58.46.45**

**In the name of Stichting Erfgoed 40-45**

**The foundation has ANBI status.**