



## HISTORY OF THE NETHERLANDS EX-SERVICEMEN & WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION IN AUSTRALIA,

with special reference to the positions of Tony van Grieken.

The organisation was formed as a result of a merger between:

- **The Netherlands Ex-Marines**

By input of the late Col J A J de Bruin, Commander of the Marine Brigade in Indonesia the first meeting of Ex-Marines was held at the home of Consul General Jhr van Swinderen at Point Piper in Sydney on **10<sup>th</sup> December 1951** (birthday of "Het Korps Mariniers"-**10 December 1665**) Some 50 attended and due to its success, it was unanimously agreed to celebrate the corps' birthday on 10th December each year. Tony van Grieken was appointed President, Harry van den Elzen secretary and Robert van der Vegt treasurer.

- **Nederlandse Oud Strijders**

Made up of ex KNIL (Royal Netherlands East Indies Army and Air Force), mainly operating in the Wollongong Area, South of Sydney, where they participated in the Anzac Day March. Subsequently also in Sydney.

As it was considered inappropriate to have two different Dutch ex-servicemen groups, Tony van Grieken and Harry van den Elzen (Ex Marines) approached Dirk van Arkel, ex-military police, and Henk Rutgers LLB, advocaat military tribunal in Indonesia, (Oud Strijders) with a view to merge into one Association. After lengthy discussions it was agreed to complete the merger.

Henk Rutgers LLB prepared a Constitution and the name 'Netherlands Ex-Servicemen & Women's Association in Australia' was incorporated on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1969. Its first National Committee: Anthony van Grieken, Harry van den Elzen secretary, Robert van der Vegt treasurer (all ex-marines), Dick van Arkel, Henk Rutgers and Rudie Swane (oud strijders).

The objects of the Association are:

- (a) To Promote the spirit of fellowship among the Netherlands Ex-Servicemen and Women in Australia.
- (b) To promote and further the financial interest of members by actively lobbying appropriate government/s to obtain, maintain or increase financial, medical, travel and/or other benefits peculiar to ex-servicemen & women in general and members in particular.
- (c) To further cultural relations, organise celebrations and participate in commemorations in connection with war services and to provide entertainment for its' members.



- (d) To establish and keep up contacts with other Associations, clubs, companies, promoting similar objects as this Association.
- (e) To pay, satisfy. or compromise any claims made against the Association which it may seem expedient to pay, satisfy or compromise, notwithstanding that the same may not be valid law.
- (f) To undertake and execute, after receiving approval through a majority vote of the Branches any trust the undertaking of which may seem beneficial to the Association.
- (g) To let, lease, hire or charter the whole or any part of property of the Association on such terms as may be determined.
- (h) To open, establish, regulate and carry on branches, sub-branches, local committees or agencies in all parts of the world and discontinue same. These branches, sub-branches, local committees and agencies shall at all times remain under full control of the local branch committee, elected under this constitution.
- (i) To appoint a subcommittee or sub-committees and to organise and advance the interest of members who wish to form themselves into a group within the Association; such committees to be responsible in every respect to the branch committee.
- (j) To do all such things as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of the above objects or any of them, in any part of the world.
- (k) To establish permanent relations among the national associations or federations and international organisations of war veterans and war victims in all countries
- (l) To encourage direct cooperation and relations of friendship and understanding among national associations or federations and the exchange of experience in all fields affecting their interests, including the exchange of information on their respective legislations."

The first President elected was Rudie Swane, pilot in 18<sup>th</sup> squadron, who held the position for 1 year. Tony van Grieken was elected as President the following year and held that position until 1982. Harry van den Elzen was elected as Secretary, a position he held for many years and Robert van der Vegt as Treasurer. Henk Rutgers LLB suggested that we should create a Benevolent Fund to assist members in need. This fund known as "The Netherlands Ex-Servicemen & Women's Benevolent Fund" was subsequently established and has been able to assist some of our members. The Association has been active in arranging for assistance with pensions and other benefits for our members. This particularly in the earlier years required a lot of work due to the Netherland's authorities not voluntarily publishing available pensions. It was a matter of writing to all the different departments with eventually striking the right one. Many members have benefited from this assistance. In the subsequent years with the capable assistance of the late Andrew Hilbrink and Andy de Leng, who were acting as "pension officers", extremely good results were achieved. This type of assistance resulted in many new members joining and to take advantage of the service provided by the Association. As a result of the



broadcasting the existence of the Association by Radio 2EA (later SBS Dutch Programme) in different states and advertising in the then Dutch Australian Weekly many Netherlands Ex-Servicemen & Women joined NESWA. This resulted in the pursuing the creation of interstate branches which eventually took place, Western Australia 1972, Victoria 1982 and Queensland 1973. Tony van Grieken, as then National President, was replaced by Dick van Arkel in 1983. Dick was instrumental in the opening of branches in South Australia and Tasmania. Unfortunately, the Tasmanian branch was closed due to a falling membership and became part of the Victorian branch. Dick held the position of National President until 1993 and endeavoured to promote the Association in many ways. The position of National President was subsequently taken over by Paul Couvret in January 1993 and Andy de Leng was appointed as National Secretary. Due to a sudden passing away of Andy his position was taken over by Tony van Grieken, who was elected at the Triennial meeting of branches in Adelaide on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2001. Due to the resignation of the NSW President in 1999, the National President, Paul Couvret and the NSW Patron and Consul General of the Netherlands, Ed Reitsma, requested Tony van Grieken to come back to the fold and accept the position of NSW President, a position he held until 2016. The Association was keen to have a monument erected in Canberra and due to Dick van Arkel's efforts, by securing Dutch Government subsidy when he was in Holland and the appreciated financial assistance from the Australian Government, and also being instrumental in the approval and securing an appropriate block of land for the monument by Lou and Mandy van 't Westende, the monument became a reality and was unveiled on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1991 by the then Governor General, the Hon Bill Hayden AC. Each year on the 4<sup>th</sup> May a Commemoration is organised by this Association with the capable and much appreciated assistance of the Netherlands Embassy and Netherlands Defence Attaché in Canberra. The Netherlands Ambassador and many Australian military and civilian dignitaries and representatives from other countries attend the Commemoration, which has become a great success and has assisted in recognition of the Netherlands navy, air force and merchant navy's assistance in the defence of Australia. In particular in the Battle of the Java Sea. Some of the branches now have their own monument and hold the 4<sup>th</sup> May Commemoration, which is also attended by ex-military and civilians. The Association's members in each state take part in the Battle of the Java Sea Commemoration in February, Anzac Day marches on the 25<sup>th</sup> April, 4<sup>th</sup> May Commemoration and other ceremonies each year, proudly showing their banners and Dutch flag, which once again assists in "Vlag Vertoon". Although at the peak we had an Australia wide membership of around 900, this has now dwindled to 134 **full** members and approx 20 **associate** members (non-military relations) in NSW (incl. ACT) and SA. This is mainly due to the closing of the Victorian and Queensland branches which were unsuccessful in securing new committee members, as well as many of the members reaching an age and contracting disabilities which stopped them from participation and many of them having passed away. As Paul Couvret passed away in September 2013, Tony van Grieken took over the position.