

The Canadian Summer of 1945

The story behind the photo

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Charles H. Richer

Josha Sietsma, Ede, the Netherlands, passed some years of his youth in Hamilton, ON, Canada. He's interested in (war) photography, Canadian history, and baseball. Searching the *Library & Archives Canada* on the combination of these interests he stumbled across an unique photo. The same picture was also found in the city-archives of Ede. In the photo we see ladies from the *Eager Beavers* playing baseball. The picture was taken by Charles H. Richer on August 31, 1945. Charles H. Richer was part of the *Canadian Army Film and Photo Unit* (CFPU). The Canadian Archive caption reads that the game was played between the *Eager Beavers* and the officers of the *Regina Rifle Regiment*. It also says this picture was taken somewhere on the Veluwe, the Netherlands. *Regina's Sport Field* was the name of the area where the friendly game was played. The picture is in possession of the *Library & Archives Canada* and can be identified with the number PA-116314 (**picture 1**).



Picture 1



Inspired by the photo, Josha Sietsma made a baseball scorebook for the local baseball club, the Moorfielders. It is the first baseball scorebook ever for a club in the Netherlands. The picture brought him to the idea for the unique cover. It is homage to the liberators, veterans, the CFPU, and to the special sport of baseball. Illustrator Jedi Noordegraaf from Studio Vandaar, in Ede, made the cover-design. The similarities between Charles H. Richer's photo and the drawn illustration are obvious.

Ede in 1945

Although much information had been garnered about the photo, many questions still remained: where was this picture taken and where is the *Regina's Sport Field*? To find the place and story behind the photo we need to go back to the spring and summer of 1945.

The first allied military personnel in Ede in 1945 came from the combined British and Canadian forces. Both forces liberated the town of Ede on April 17, 1945. The British forces belonged to the 49th Infantry Division (*Polar Bear*). They were temporarily stationed in Ede after the liberation on the 17th of April. The *Ede Swim and Water Polo Club Polar Bears* thank their name and emblem to this division. They did so to keep the memory of the liberation alive.

On April the 17th the British infantry division is assisted by Canadian tanks from two different battalions from the 1st Canadian tank brigade: the 11th Battalion the *Ontario Regiment* and the 14th Battalion the *Calgary Regiment*. Just like the British *Polar Bear* division the *Ontario Regiment* remains in the town of Ede after the liberation on April 17. The *Calgary Regiment* leaves the town after the liberation.

With the capitulation of the German occupation forces on May 5, 1945 the Ede stationed Canadian and British forces decide to move onwards. On May 7 they leave for Utrecht and Den Haag. The garrison town of Ede is now without garrison, but not for long.

Canadian presence in Ede

With the end of May approaching the Canadians return to Ede. This time it is the 7th Canadian infantry brigade. This brigade is part of the 3rd Canadian infantry division and part of the 2nd Canadian Army Corps. Their presence in Ede will never be forgotten due to their heavy involvement in the liberation of the Netherlands.

In order to understand where 'our' Canadians came from we need to go back in time a bit further. It is the beginning of June 1944. The 1st Canadian Army Corps is fighting in Italy. The 2nd Canadian Army Corps participates during the landings on Normandy and during the liberation route through the Northwest of Europe. In the beginning of 1945 the 2nd Canadian Army Corps is in the Netherlands near the Rhine. When finally the 1st Canadian Army Corps arrives from Italy all Canadian troops are in the Netherlands. They will become known as the 1st Canadian Army.

In the spring of 1945 the 1st Canadian Army moves eastwards. Via Nijmegen and Emmerich they will enter Germany. Pretty quickly the Canadians will move northwards and will cross the Dutch border again in the town of Gendringen. It is there where the Canadian Army is split: the 1st Canadian Army Corps will be deployed to liberate the Veluwe and the Midwest of the Netherlands. The 2nd Canadian Army Corps will concentrate on liberating the North of the Netherlands.

At the moment of the capitulation on May 5, 1945 the 2nd Canadian Army Corps has liberated the whole East and Northern part of the Netherlands. The 1st Canadian Army Corps, alongside the *Polar Bear*, have liberated the Veluwe. Due to negotiations with the enemy the 1st Canadian Army Corps cannot move westwards. They halt at what is known as the Grebbelinie (in German *Pantherstellung*). The area west of Ede thus actually becomes the front of war. This will last until after the capitulation and eventually the roads westwards open. The British and Canadian troops will go on to disarm the enemy in the provinces of Utrecht, North- and South -Holland.

After the capitulation a part of the British forces immediately leaves back towards the United Kingdom. Another part will occupy Germany or will become operational in other places such as the Middle East and Asia.

The Canadians however are 'done'. They will not be part of the occupying force (the Americans, British, French and Russians will do that) and will return back to Canada. However, as there is a lack of logistical means, few operational boats, and lesser priority in shipping the more than 100.000 men they will have to wait.

The Canadian Summer

This waiting happens in the Netherlands. The Canadian divisions are encamped and spread all over the country. This period is known as the Canadian Summer; even though this 'summer' will endure until November and December.

It must be clear that after years of intense fighting the sudden boredom of these men was quite probable. Boredom and the longing to be home could lead to undesirable situations. The military should be entertained. A lot is organized by the military themselves: evenings filled with dance, music and cabaret. Theater and film performances, entertainment for the local kids, site reconstructions, transport assistance, surveillance, etc. The Canadian troops would also welcome entertainment groups from Canada during their period of waiting.

The town of Ede would station their 'own' Canadian division: the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade, about 3,500 men. This brigade is part of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division and part of the 2nd Canadian Army Corps.

7th Canadian Infantry Brigade

The 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade is one of the divisions that first landed on JUNO Beach, Normandy on June 6, 1944. The brigade endures heavy fighting at Caen and Falaise, Normandy. With the advancing ally troops towards the borders of Germany and Belgium the brigade becomes active at Calais, Dunkirk, and Dieppe. The brigade would also be deployed in Breskens.

In the winter of 1944-1945 the front lays still. The allies fail to advance. The 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade will stay in Nijmegen during this period. In the beginning of 1945 the brigade will march further. Departing Nijmegen they will leave to Germany, via Emmerich and back to the Netherlands again where they will liberate the northern part of the country. Leaving the north of the country the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade relocates to Ede. The brigade

consisted of the staff and three battalions: the *1st Battalion The Canadian Scottish Regiment*, the *1st Battalion The Royal Winnipeg Rifles Regiment*, and the *1st Battalion The Regina Rifle Regiment*.

When in Ede the Canadian commander, lieutenant-colonel Gregory, rejects the idea of lodging his soldiers amongst citizens (the British did though). Maintaining discipline would be tough, according to Gregory. The military were first stationed in three schools: Paasberg, Cavaljé, and the Maandereind. After having cleaned the local army barracks the Canadians started making use of the barracks at the Elias Beekman, the P.L. Bergansius, the Van Essen, the Arthur Kool, and the Maurits. All former army barracks.

The Canadian soldiers undertook all kinds of activity in the community of Ede. A lot of small projects but they also worked on four major projects: the Bart van Elst plantation (borough of Bennekom), park Stompekamp, renovation of the Open Lucht theatre, and the construction of the Mausoleum and the Memorial Park of Ede. One of the remarkable smaller projects was work preparations for the War Museum of Ede.

Eager Beavers

The Canadian men from the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade are thus found in the baseball picture taken by Charles H. Richer. The men are from the *1st Battalion The Regina Rifle Regiment* and the women are from the *Eager Beavers*.

Joshua Sietsma writes that Canada sent different groups of men and women to entertain the troops in Europe. The war was over and the long wait to return home would become more pleasant with entertainment. The *Eager Beavers* were an entertainment group sponsored by the *Sun Life Assurance of Canada*. They made their way to Europe, as many others, on the famous SS Ile de France. After contact with Dale Gervais, independent researcher and responsible for the CFPU website, they discover a quote in a diary written by Kay Hoskins (nee Ward). She writes: “the game was played at the ‘Regina’s Sports Field’ at Ede” and later on adds: “Also a film unit took four or five pictures of the highlights of the game”.

A rare photograph of the *Eager Beavers* off the playing field exists from 1945 (**picture 2**). This photo is registered at the *Library & Archives Canada* with the number PA-152136. This picture was taken on July 4, 1945 by Lieutenant Arthur L. Cole in Aldershot (England). According to the caption, members of the *Eager Beavers Entertainment Troupe* from Montreal, Canada were visiting Aldershot. At that moment Aldershot is an important British military base stationing the *Royal Corps of Transport*, the *Army Catering Corps* and the *Parachute Regiment*.

In the picture, from left to right, we have: Kay Ward, Daisy Miller, Sheila Galbraith, Margaret Blais, Dorothy Johnston, Marie Lucas, Cathie Fullerton, Gert Thomas, and in the front, below, “Mike” Kelly.

The Game

The picture Joshua Sietsma found in the *Library & Archives Canada* (**picture 1**) remembers other earlier published photos. The diary fragments also state that there were more pictures taken of the game on the 31st of August 1945, but where are they? After some research, three of the photographs have been discovered.

Picture 3 can be found on page 58 of “Herinneringen aan de toekomst” by Jan Durk Tuinier and published in 1995. The source of the photo is the Local Archives of Ede. The photo is filed under GA21946. This picture seems to be of a higher quality and can also be found in the *Library & Archives Canada* PA116311.

Picture 4 is found on page 68 in “Bevrijdingskroniek Noord-West Veluwe” by E. van de Weerd and G. Crebolder, published in 1989.

Picture 5 is to be found in “Ede in Oorlog en Vrede” by R. Nijhoff and E. van de Weerd and published in 1991. The photo can be found on page 63. Sadly, no source is mentioned for the photo.

On all photos we find members of the Canadian entertainment group *Eager Beavers* sporting alongside the Canadian military. According to Kay Hoskin’s diary the pictures were taken at the *Regina’s Sport Field* in Ede. The people in **picture 5** are sitting in front of the so-called underground bunker.

After intense photo research the first impression is that the pictures were taken at the ENKA factory (**picture 6**). However, when comparing windows, roofing, and number of levels there is a mismatch.

With the chimney found on the photos we can exactly locate the place of the photographs. Charles H. Richer, when taking **picture 1**, stood right in front of the building he photographed. This is an important detail. The chimney could never have been of the ENKA. The Johan Willem Friso barrack is the only logical option as to where **picture 1** was taken. Anno 2016 the Johan Willem Friso barrack doesn’t have a chimney. But looking back at historical

pictures (**pictures 10, 11 and 12**) we will find that the barrack used to have a chimney at exactly the same spot as on **picture 1**.

The people in picture 5 are sitting in front of the so-called underground bunker. How can we know that the barracks in Ede had such bunkers? In German photos from during the occupation we will find the underground bunkers (**picture 13**). The entrance is obvious and can be seen. Our platform is actually trying to find the original copy of this picture. On an aerial photo from 1944 (**picture 14**) we can also see the exact positions of the underground bunkers. We must assume that these places were open enough and could hold spectators wanting to watch the game, but what about the roof?

The roof on picture 1

On September 17, 1944 the barracks of Ede are bombed and partially destroyed. In the frenzy and panic after the German landing they also tried to light some of the barracks on fire. The result of the fire can be seen on **picture 15**. We can see that parts of the Maurits and Johan Willem Friso barracks are aflame and destroyed by the fire. No roof is left. We can even see the room from above. A part of the Johan Willem Friso barracks is still on fire in this picture; we can see the smoke.

If Charles H. Richer would have taken picture 1 in front of the Maurits barrack in 1945 he would have seen how the right wing would still be intact. Both wing and roof are still there. However, on picture 1 we don't see a roof, as there is none. Thus, Charles H. Richer was not in front of the Maurits barrack when he took picture 1.

At the Johan Willem Friso barrack there is a different story. The smoke is still there and we can almost look right into the roofless building. If Charles H. Richer would've taken this photograph in 1945 he would see a fire-damaged right wing of a roofless building. The same image can also be seen on a postcard taken right after the war (**picture 16**). In the middle left of the railway station we find the damaged barrack of Johan Willem Friso. We can also see the barrack has a flat roof. The *Regina's Sport Field* was the lawn in front of the Johan Willem Friso barrack (**picture 18 and 19**).

The naming of Regina Sport Field

The *Regina Sport Field* was used by the *1st Battalion the Regina Rifle Regiment* from the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade. As they assist and build new sites in the city of Ede they are thanked by a memorial plaque. On the day of their departure, November 6, 1945, the plaque is attached and shown to the public (**picture 20 and 21**). The council of Ede ends up paying for the memorial plaque. Later on, this plaque is removed from its original place, the Mausoleum, and brought to the entrance of the memorial park (**picture 22**). In place of the memorial plaque at the Mausoleum the city council places the insignia of the city of Ede. Perhaps this is a bit of revenge as they had paid for the memorial plaque back in 1946. One important aspect is missing today on this plaque. Of the three battalions present in Ede one important insignia is missing: the *Regina Rifle Regiment* (**picture 22, 23 and 24**).

The date

Charles H. Richer took the photo of the baseball game on August 31, 1945. This is an important date for Ede and the Netherlands. On this very date Queen Wilhelmina has her birthday, so for the first time in five years the Dutch will have back their famous Queensday: a day of celebration and parties. In all of the Netherlands, and also in Ede, people commemorate like never before. The whole town is excited and many take part in the festivities and the decorating. Streets and houses are decorated with flowers, twigs, flags, ribbons, and parachutes. Anything is useful (**picture 25**).

In the morning of August 31 the Canadian military held a parade through the city centre. Some pictures show the Canadian men marching through the rain on this special day (**picture 26**). Later in the afternoon the rain would stop. All kinds of activities took place, including the game depicted by Charles H. Richer. The iconic picture wasn't just taken on an ordinary day, it was a special commemorative day. A day to remember for generations: it was the biggest feast in town after five years of war and occupation.

The special day is closed with music. ENKA men's choir and both harmonies from Ede would give a concert in the theater restored by the very Canadian military. Halfway through the concert people would leave for the big square in town: it was announced that the Canadians would be playing some jazz.

September 1, 1945

On the next day, September 1, 1945, it is feast again. People came out to celebrate the liberation. It is sunny and, again, a lot of activities are organized. Many of the activities took place with the Canadians and their own club (Rendez-vous Club) behind what is now known as the Reehorst. In the afternoon there is a parade and some color pictures were taken of this parade. On **picture 27** we see the entrance of the Johan Willem Friso barracks with here and there a soldier. We can see four Canadian military men of the 7th Infantry Brigade. With the insignias visible we can exactly determine to which company they belonged. With the red insignias we know that the only regiment with such a color would be the *Regina Rifle Regiment*. We have always thought that the women alongside the military were regular Dutch ladies. However, with the knowledge we have now we must consider this to be women from the *Eager Beavers*.

One happy man

We do not know how the baseball match ended on that 31st of August. We know that the *Eager Beavers* are there and are to be recognized by the big Maple Leaf on their shirts. What calls our attention on **picture 4** and **5** is the one happy man. About 3,500 men are stationed in Ede and not more than 35 ladies from the *Eager Beavers*. Why do these six *Eager Beavers* pick up this man? Who is he? The reason is really innocent: in order to keep this man from scoring the ladies keep him away from home base. A bit of creativity in the game to appease the players on both sides.

Follow-up

Some questions are in need of an answer after what has been written above.

- Where is the diary of Kay Hoskins? What is in it? Would we discover how long the *Eager Beavers* were in Ede? Were they also the ones playing jazz on the night of the 31st of August?
- Where are the other pictures? We know that Charles H. Richer took more photos of the game. Where are they?
- Where is the *Regina's Rifle Regiment* insignia from the Memorial Park plaque?
- Why wasn't Richer repatriated with the rest of his battalion, 1 Canadian Parachute Battalion? (See report 17)

Caption page 19: Lieutenant Colonel A.S. Gregory. He was the commander of the whole of the 7th Canadian infantry Brigade.

Caption page 20 top picture: on the right a soldier from the 1st Battalion The Regina Rifle Regiment, in the middle a soldier from the 1st Battalion The Royal Winnipeg Rifles Regiment, and on the left a soldier from the 1st Battalion The Canadian Scottish Regiment

Caption page 21 top: The picture was taken on the Stationsweg, just across from the Catholic Church.

Caption page 22 bottom: idem. This wasn't however the farewell parade, that actually took place on November 6, 1945.

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