



Overloon War Chronicles Foundation
presents:

FACES FROM THE PAST

(episode 7)

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The Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery in Overloon, popularly known as the English cemetery, contains 281 graves. Each with its own story. In this series of reports, the Overloon War Chronicles Foundation highlights one such special story each time. This time grave number 8, section IV, row A.

Ronald Crouch (1916 – 1945)
Always a little further

"Ronnie was a great fighter and the life and soul of any unit he was with. The part played by men of his character in winning a war must be very great."

(Source: Quote from a letter from a friend of Ronald Crouch to Elizabeth Crouch)

The sun is relentless. The heat is unbearable. But they must go on! They have been walking through this desert for over 3 weeks now, this huge sandbox that never ends! They must have covered more than 250 miles by now. How far is it to their own British lines in Egypt? And what is the chance that they will be captured again by those Germans or Italians before that time? They have to move on. They must go on!

Ronald Lionel Crouch is born in Bishopston, a suburb of Bristol, on Friday 14 July 1916. He is the son of Ernest W. Crouch and Enid Crouch.

Ronald, known as Ronnie, is educated at St. Brendan's College in Bristol and will work for Marks & Spencer Ltd. where he climbs up to the position of assistant manager of the Castle Street branch.

In June 1940 Ronald marries Elizabeth (Betty) Jones.

Elizabeth is the daughter of Edwin Jones and his wife who live at Backingstone Farm in Bishopston. However, this is not the suburb of Bristol, but the village with the same name near Swansea in Wales. Two places with the exact same name with only 80 miles (130 kilometers) between them. After their wedding Ronald and Elizabeth move to Bishopston (Wales). Their only child Roberta (Bobbie) is born on 27 October 1940.

Ronald is a sportsman, he is a fanatic rugby player. His wife Elizabeth is a district nurse in their hometown.

At that time Ronald's military career has already been underway for 8 years. Because on 16 August 1932, as a 16-year-old, he joins the Territorial Army (Territorials), the active volunteer army of the United Kingdom. In 1939 he transfers to the British Army.

Serving in France in 1940, he is wounded there and is evacuated a week before the thousands of British troops have to be evacuated from the beaches of Dunkirk to escape from the advancing Germans.

After his recovery, Ronald is sent on a military mission to Greece. Fierce fighting forces him to be evacuated to Crete. On Crete he gets slightly injured and manages to escape in a small fishing boat.

He serves in Tunisia and fights against the Afrika Korps of German General Rommel. The German Afrika Korps was sent to Libya in February 1941 to support the demoralized Italian forces in their Libyan colony. The Italians had suffered one defeat after another against the British troops. With the deployment of the Afrika Korps, Hitler hopes to turn the battle in North Africa in favor of the Axis powers again.

The main goal in that campaign for the Germans is to gain control of the Suez Canal in British-controlled Egypt. The Suez Canal, also known as the 'trachea of the British Empire'. When that strategic canal falls into German hands, it could mean a total turnaround in the war.

But the Germans face problems in the African desert. There is the exhaustion because of the continuous struggle and the desert climate. But the supply lines from Italy across the Mediterranean are also getting longer. The supply lines are under constant attack from the British, both at sea and from the British air bases in Malta.

The most important factor, however, is that the British are getting stronger in Africa. But also the focus of the German high command in Berlin changes, seeing that Berlin is forced to concentrate more and more on the hard battle on the Eastern Front, the battle with the Soviet Union.

In the battle in Africa Ronald distinguishes himself through his bravery and actions, including in the battles around the Rewizat Ridge.

His military career, meanwhile, is moving very quickly. In February 1942 he is promoted to Captain. But shortly afterwards he is captured in Benghazi, in Italian Libya.

He is put in a German prison in the city where many more British are imprisoned. Sitting there and waiting for what's to come, this was not Ronald's spirit. He wants out!

That opportunity comes unexpectedly when British bomber planes attack the city of Benghazi. In the confusion that ensues, Ronald and 10 other young British officers manage to escape from their prison.

It's the start of a hellish journey. In 29 days the men walk nearly 300 miles eastwards, across the desert, through enemy lines on their way to their own British lines.

The desert climate is unforgiving and unpredictable. This trip is one of heat and burning sun, but also of heavy rain and bitter cold. During their journey the men meet nomads who offer them a place to sleep, the men are given bread and goat's milk, and then continue their long journey.

During the last days of their journey, the men suddenly see a German transport truck approaching. The men lay low, but the moment the truck is close enough, the British suddenly jump onto the road and pretend it's an ambush. The German driver is forced to stop.

One of the British officers holds a wrench in his hand like a pistol. Convincing enough for the German driver who surrenders immediately.

But it turns out that this truck doesn't have enough petrol to complete the journey to the British lines. They tie up the German, take his revolver and wait for a second truck. A second truck soon appears, the men also force this truck to stop and they also capture this driver.

After a journey through enemy territory, they arrive at their own British lines with 2 trucks and the 2 German prisoners. They succeeded! Then the men are transferred to Cairo in Egypt. Ronald is hospitalized with dysentery and a grenade wound in the arm.

From Cairo Ronald writes in a letter to his wife Elizabeth: *"We had no food for the first few days, and then had with the Arabs some goats milk and bread. On that diet I lost two and a half stones, so am now on a reasonable weight again." [...] "We had lots of excitement getting away, and lots of narrow squeaks. It was the worst and hardest three weeks of my*

life.” [...] “We had no boots or blankets. It rained most days and was bitterly cold, but gosh, it was grand to be back again.”

Partly due to his escape action and courage, Ronald is promoted to Major in October 1942, 8 months after he was promoted to Captain.

El Hamma is an oasis town in southeastern Tunisia, located in the Gabès Governorate, 30 kilometers west of the city of Gabès. Between 1 and 4 February 1943, around El Hamma a major battle takes place between the Allies, 45,000 strong (commanded by British General Kenneth Anderson) and 12,000 Italian troops (commanded by General Curio Barbasetti di Prun).

Heavy British attacks ensure that after 3 days the Italians withdraw to Cap Bon due to heavy losses. At that time 1265 Italians were killed, the British lost 145 men. In Cap Bon the Italians would surrender later.

The Germans try to retaliate in the Battle of Medenine (6 March 1943) to slow down the British advance of the British 8th Army, but it ends in a German fiasco.

Ten days later the Battle of the Mareth Line starts between the British 8th Army (led by General Bernard Montgomery) and the Italian-German 1st Army (led by General Giovanni Messe). The battle would last until 31 March.

The Mareth Line in Tunisia is a line of fortifications built by the French in the 1930s to protect their colony of Tunisia against possible incursions by the Italians from their colony of Libya. During Operation Supercharge II on 26 March and 27 March the British manage to break through the Tebaga Gap, a low mountain pass, and advance towards El Hamma.

On 27 March in the twilight, another heroic action by Ronald follows. At El Hamma the rear of the Divisional Artillery Group is attacked by tanks and four 88mm guns. Ronald is commander of the anti-tank battery and leads the counterattack. He manages to take out several enemy tanks and all four 88mm guns by his control and fast action at close range. The enemy then retreats, with considerable damage and casualties. The British lose only two trucks.

Ronald puts it into perspective with a great sense of typical British humor when he describes his action as *“A little party we did at El Hamma.”*

Ronald would later be awarded the Military Cross for his action and leadership in El Hamma.

On 13 May 1943 the struggle in Africa ends with the official German surrender in Tunis. The approximately 230,000 German and Italian troops had already surrendered to the British and American troops in the days before.

Returning home in November 1943, Ronald becomes a staff officer and anti-aircraft instructor at the School of Artillery in Larkhill, Salisbury.

He holds that position until the Allied landings in Normandy in June 1944.

From July 1944 he is second in command of the 75th Anti-Tank Regiment (75ATR) in the 11th Armored Division (11AD).

That division lands in Normandy on 13 and 14 June and then makes occasional attacks to reach the strategic city of Caen.

Until 25 June they will continue to look for a way to take Caen.

Operation Epsom starts on 26 June with the Battle of the Odon, but the Allies fail to capture Caen.

In the period between 30 June to 16 July there is little action for the 11AD. A relative rest, time to recover and resupply the men.

The action returns on 18 July with Operation Goodwood in which, after two days, Caen is finally captured by 11AD and 3ID. Goodwood is followed by Operation Bluecoat with the task of guarding the main supply routes and supporting the Americans on the western flank during their breakout.

On 7 August Hitler gives up Normandy. The Allies take advantage of this. What follows is the quick and fairly easy Allied advance through northern France in a northeasterly direction. Hereby the ports occupied by the Germans on the Channel are left for what they are. Because the goal of this Allied advance is greater: Antwerp! And in particular the port of Antwerp, which will serve as a second port of disembarkation in order to be able to shorten the increasingly longer supply lines from Normandy. The advance through northern France is called *The Great Swan* by the British, based on the concept of swanning along. Everywhere the British are applauded and welcomed by the French population. The British are given fruit and flowers, but also wine and champagne. The British are now also passing through the area where many of their fathers and uncles fought or were killed 30 years earlier during the First World War. Places such as Arras, Loos and Lens. And above all Ypres. Seeing all those British World War I cemeteries makes some passing British troops somewhat emotional.

Antwerp is liberated on 4 September by the 11AD with a leading role for 3RTR led by Lieutenant Colonel Silvertop, with the port falling almost undamaged into the hands of the Allies. However, it will still take months before the first Allied ship can reach the harbor as the Germans still control both banks of the Scheldt estuary and thereby prevent all shipping on the Scheldt.

On 8 September 11AD and 3ID arrive in Neerpelt at the Maas-Scheldt Canal. The 8th Corps would be formed here in the coming weeks, which will also consist of 43ID in addition to 11AD and 3ID. 8th Corps will then be responsible for the left flank in Operation Market Garden in The Netherlands which would start on 17 September. They are commanded by General Richard O'Connor.

Between 17 September and 25 September the division liberates a whole series of Brabant places. Valkenswaard, Heeze, Leende, Budel, Maarheeze, Asten, Geldrop, Liessel, Ommel, Helmond and Deurne.

Then from Deurne the route continues via Gemert to Sint Anthonis. Ronald would arrive there on Monday 25 September.

It turns out to be a black Monday in Sint Anthonis because as the village fills up with British troops and vehicles during the afternoon, around 4.30 pm on the outskirts of the village at an open bifurcation Lieutenant Colonel David Silvertop (3RTR) and Lieutenant Colonel Hubert Orr (3MONS) are shot dead during a meeting with Charles Barnet "Roscoe" Harvey (Brigade Commander 11th Armoured Division) and his Brigade Major J. Thompson. The fatal shots are fired from machine guns from 2 passing German half-tracks on the run who suddenly appear in the village and who try to find their way out in full panic.

After Sint Anthonis, the Battle of Overloon follows, where the British are deployed in October. In November, as part of Operation Nutcracker, they penetrate deeper towards Venlo to roll up the German bridgehead there.

In this period, October 1944 – January 1945, they also hold defensive positions in that dangerous Maas region.

In addition to an enormous sense of duty, Ronald always displayed a great sense of responsibility, as evidenced by the text of an Army Appraisal from May 1945:

"At all times he has regularly visited all guns positions in the most forward and exposed areas, particularly in the period when the division was holding defensive positions in East Holland and on river Maas from October 1944 to January 1945. These visits had to be made to areas that were regularly shelled and mortared and his courage and example proved a great encouragement to the gun crews."

On 23 February 1945 the British forces cross the German border and the battle of the 11AD will continue all the way to the river Elbe, Hamburg and Kiel.

On 7 May, one day before the end of the war, Ronald stands out again. In the area of Liebenau, between Bremen and Hannover, a convoy of British vehicles ends up in an ambush and is suddenly fired upon by a group of SS men. Ronald and his driver are in a scout car at the forefront of the convoy when suddenly their car is hit by a bazooka shot. Ronald is launched from the car and ends up in a ditch next to the road, whereupon the car explodes. His driver manages to climb out of the car and attempts to help Ronald, but at that moment the driver is fatally struck by German machine gun fire. Ronald is still stunned from the shock, but manages to crawl back, under heavy German fire from small arms fire, to the leading troop car that was blocked by the shelling. Ronald quickly hatches a plan, manages to dislodge a weapon from the troop car, and then leads the assault on the SS men who are wiped out to just one man.

In Europe the Second World War ends on 8 May with the total unconditional capitulation of Nazi-Germany. It's V.E. Day, Victory in Europe Day.

In June Ronald's regiment is stationed near the German city Aachen. Ronald is currently Acting Lieutenant Colonel, another step towards the next promotion.

But completely unexpectedly, things will turn out differently.

It is a beautiful summer evening on Tuesday 26 June 1945. The war is over, The Netherlands and Belgium are liberated. It is quiet at the small border post Neder-Canne on the Cannerweg in the far south of the Dutch province Limburg. At this Dutch border crossing the barrier is open and a soldier of the Border Guard of the Dutch Military Authority (Militaire Gezag, MG) stands guard.

The Cannerweg is a dirt road full of potholes.

A little further towards the Belgian village Kanne and the Belgian border post overthere, in the evening sun lies the dilapidated castle Neder-Canne that was built against the slope of the Cannerberg ages before.

It is around 9.15 pm that evening when Ronald returns from Belgium in his Jeep via the Belgian border village Kanne and approaches the Dutch border post Neder-Canne.

But for a reason only known to Ronald, just before the border post, he suddenly accelerates and races without stopping at more than 60 kilometers per hour across the border!

The soldier of the Dutch Military Authority immediately fires a warning shot into the air.

Ronald does not react and continues towards Maastricht!

The soldier fires a second shot, aimed at the rear tire.

The Jeep drives on!

The soldier now fires a third shot aimed at the Jeep.

But the Jeep disappears out of sight after the right bend in the Cannerweg.

Silence returns at the border post.

But not for long. Because some time later it appears that Ronald's Jeep has come to a slow stop on the verge just after the bend in the Cannerweg on the right side of the road.

The final shot hit Ronald in the head. He died instantly.

In this period, just after the liberation, this Limburg region is temporarily in the American section. Ronald's body is transferred by the Americans to the American cemetery in Margraten. The transfer is done by the American 3136th Quartermaster Service company. This company, consisting of black American soldiers who are partly stationed in castle Neder-Canne near the border post and near the place where Ronald died, had the task in the American army to bury the dead in the American cemeteries.

On 1 May 1947, Ronald's remains are transferred to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery in Overloon.

Ronald is a war hero, highly appreciated and highly respected by all who have worked with him. As a close friend and companion of Ronald writes in his letter to widow Elizabeth

Crouch in 1945: *“Ronnie was a great fighter and the life and soul of any unit he was with. The part played by men of his character in winning a war must be very great.”*

Ronald has been highly decorated several times.

In 1946 he posthumously receives the Military Cross for his important part in El Hamma in 1943.

The letter of the War Office in Whitehall to Elizabeth Crouch announcing the Military Cross also mentions the recommendation text: *“By his quick action and determined leadership, Major Crouch undoubtedly saved many important vehicles of the Royal Artillery Group and inflicted severe losses on the enemy.”*

In addition to the Military Cross, he is posthumously awarded the DSO (Distinguished Service Order) in July 1949 for gallantry and distinguished achievements. The recommendation for the DSO contains the text which pays tribute to Ronald Crouch, which really shows who Ronald Crouch was and what he stood for: *“Throughout the entire campaign Major Crouch’s energy and daring had the greatest possible moral effect on the men in the regiment. He has shown himself an outstanding leader and his lust for battle has remained entirely unquenched after four years fighting in many theatres of war.”*

His family and relatives are very proud of him. Ronald's great-grandchild Jamie Gibbons serves in the Royal Marines and Special Forces between 2007 and 2018. Like Ronald, he is trained in anti-aircraft defenses at Larkhill Barracks in Salisbury. Exactly the same location where his great-grandfather Ronald was appointed as Gunnery instructor.

Ronald Crouch, a brilliant young war hero, with a great career ahead of him. A career that ended so suddenly on a deserted road in the far south of The Netherlands in the evening sun.

The deepening:

In this section various facts and parts of the story are further explained and placed in context when necessary. These explanations are listed below in the order as presented in the above story.

- Bishopston is a suburb of Bristol, in the South West of England. The name Bishopston originated in the early 1800s when the diocese decided to sell land owned by the Church to private developers, a contentious sale. The sale even brought it up for discussion in the House of Commons, but went ahead anyway. Over time, Bishopston became more and more engulfed by the ever-expanding Bristol.

This Bishopston should not be confused with the village of Bishopston in Wales, located 10 kilometers south west of Swansea.

Both Bishopstons are geographically about 80 miles apart, some 130 kilometers.

- St. Brendan's College was founded by the Catholic Irish Congregation of Christian Brothers in 1896 in Bristol's Berkely Square. It was a boys' school for the first 50 years. Many of the students later became priests, but they could also learn for other professions there.

By the late 1950s the school in Berkely Square had become too small and in 1960 the school moved to Brislington in Bristol. Today the school is officially called St. Brendan's Sixth Form College.

- Marks & Spencer, where Ronald became assistant manager of the Bristol branch on Castle Street, is a chain of department stores in mostly the United Kingdom.

In 1894 Russian-born Polish-Jewish immigrant Michael Marks opened a shop in Manchester. He then teamed up with Thomas Spencer and together they opened their first store in 1904 under the name Marks & Spencer. In the United Kingdom, the company grew to become the market leader in clothing. In addition, it mainly offers food, home accessories and furniture. Everything is produced and sold under the name Marks & Spencer.

Marks & Spencer also operates in more than 30 countries worldwide, either under its own name or under franchise.

The Castle Street branch has been gone for years. But very close by, on the other side of Castle Park, the city park, in the heart of the city is the very modern Bristol Shopping Center with hundreds of shops including a large Marks & Spencer branch, the successor of the Castle Street branch.

- The Norfolk Yeomanry was officially incorporated into the British Army in 1794 as part of the British Territorial Army.

The Territorial Army is the active volunteer reserve army within the British Army. Yeomanry is a name used by various units that are active in all kinds of military roles.

The Norfolk Yeomanry took part in, among others, the Second Boer War (1899 – 1902) and during the First World War in the battles in Gallipoli (Palestine) and on the Western Front in France and Belgium.

Between the First and Second World War, the Norfolk Yeomanry became part of the Royal Artillery. During the Second World War it served as an anti-tank regiment in the Battle of France (1940, with the Dunkirk evacuation), the Western Desert Campaign (Libya, Egypt, 1941 - 1943), the Italian Campaign (Liberation of Italy, 1943 - 1945) and the North West European Campaign (the liberation of North West Europe, 1944 - 1945).

During the Western Desert Campaign, the Norfolk Yeomanry fought alongside the 7th Armored Division, nicknamed *The Desert Rats*. That collaboration continued throughout the struggle in Italy and North-West Europe.

In 1947 the Territorial Army was reformed and after a number of amalgamations during that time the Norfolk Yeomanry became No. 677 Suffolk and Norfolk Yeomanry Squadron AAC.

- The Royal Artillery (RA) is officially called The Royal Regiment of Artillery and is nicknamed *The Gunners*. The regiment consists of various sub-regiments, partly full-time units, partly part-time units. The start of British artillery dates back to 1346 and throughout history it fought in many wars and conflicts.

During the Second World War more than 1 million British men served in the 960 different regiments of the Royal Artillery.

From its inception the Royal Artillery was based in Woolwich, south east London. In 2003 the headquarters was moved to Larkhill, Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire. Since 1915, the training locations of the Royal School of Artillery have also been located there.

- The Royal School of Artillery at Larkhill was established in 1915 under the official name School for Instruction for Royal Horse and Field Artillery (Larkhill). In 1920 the school was further expanded and given its current name.

The school offers Phase 2 training for recruits who will be deployed worldwide after their training. Also located on the complex is the Gunnery Training Team, a consultancy training service team that makes its services available not only to the Royal Artillery, but to the entire British Army.

- The 75th Anti-Tank Regiment, Royal Artillery, consisted of the 117th Battery, 118th Battery, 119th Battery and 338th Battery and was in total part of the 11th Armored Division.

- Benghazi is Libya's second largest city and an important seaport on the Mediterranean. Libya is geographically composed of 3 areas: Tripolitania, Fezzan and Cyrenaica. Cyrenaica encompasses the entire eastern half of Libya, with Benghazi being the largest city.

The history of Benghazi goes back to 525 BC when the Greeks had a colony there called Euesperides. After that era Romans, Byzantines and Arabs ruled over the city. In 1911 Italy conquered the 3 territories of Tripolitania, Fezzan and Cyrenaica from the Ottomans and made it an Italian colony. The struggle of the local population against the Italians continued until 1930. At that time the Italians came with peace proposals that led to the 3 areas being merged into 1 under the name Libia Italiana (Italian Libya) and which ensured that Benghazi blossomed again. In the late 1930s more than 20,000 Italian settlers lived in Cyrenaica, the majority in and around the city of Benghazi, which grew into a modern city.

During the Second World War the city was heavily damaged by the fighting between the Italians and the British and later the Germans and the British. The Commonwealth War Cemetery commemorates that battle. After the war Benghazi became the residence of the new Libya until 1969. In 2011 the city was the scene of the start of the uprising against the then Libyan regime.

- El Alamein is an Egyptian town bordering the Mediterranean Sea, west of Alexandria.

During the Second World War 2 major battles took place around El Alamein (1 July 1942 – 27 July 1942 and 23 October 1942 – 11 November 1942) in which the Germans suffered a sensitive defeat, their first defeat since the Battle of Britain 2 years earlier (10 July 1940 – 31 October 1940).

In El Alamein the British 8th Army of General Montgomery (field marshal in the last years of the war) managed to defeat the German Afrika Korps and the Italian Afrika Korps, commanded by the German General Field Marshal (Generalfeldmarschall) Rommel.

- The name of the city of El Hamma refers to 'hot water' and refers to the thermal springs that originate throughout the region.

- After Ronald's success in El Hamma, he and his wife officially named their home in Bishopston El Hamma as a lasting memory.

- Ronald wrote to his wife that he had lost 2.5 stone in his escape and journey through the desert. The unit stone is a unit of mass that is officially no longer in use in the United Kingdom, Ireland or the Commonwealth countries. Yet human weight in these countries is still often referred to in both pounds and stone. The exact ratio is: 1 stone = 6.35029318 kilograms, which means that 2.5 stone = 15.9 kg.

- Château Neercanne, also called castle Neercanne, is located in the Jekerdal on the Cannerweg, at the border crossing between The Netherlands and Belgium.

The original castle dates from the 13th or 14th century. It was first mentioned in 1316 under the name Agimont. That castle was built on the remains of Roman defenses against the slope of the Cannerberg.

- Over the centuries, the castle was owned by several families. In 1698 the old castle was largely demolished by the then owner Daniël Wolff, Baron van Dopff. This military commander and later governor of Maastricht had a baroque-style pleasure castle built. Since that slope was too steep to build, it was decided to build the castle there on different levels, a

so-called terraced castle. Due to this construction, castle Neercanne is the only terraced castle in the Benelux.

In July 1717 the Russian Tsar Peter the Great visited the castle. When the definitive border between Belgium and The Netherlands had to be established in 1839 as a result of the Belgian independence, most of the area was assigned to Belgium.

However, the border runs just around the castle, which therefore remained on Dutch territory. The then owner of the castle, Baron Ignace de Thier, made every effort to make the castle part of the Netherlands. He was a very loyal supporter of the Dutch royal family and bearer of a high decoration for his fight against the French troops in 1794. In 1839 the Dutch King Willem I personally ensured that a border correction would be made and the castle would remain on Dutch territory. The then military commander in chief of Maastricht, General Bernard Dobbets, had also insisted on a border correction. He had married Baroness Julie Jeanette van Tengnagell, a direct descendant of the Baron van Dopff, the builder of the castle.

The castle fell into disrepair in the 20th century. In 1945 the castle was surrounded by a wall of marl blocks of approximately 1.5 – 2 meters high, with a fence here and there. In 1947 the neglected castle became the property of the Stichting Het Limburgs Landschap, after which various major restorations followed over the years, both the buildings and the Baroque gardens. Later on also a water feature was built on the other side of the Cannerweg.

- Foundation Het Limburgs Landschap has been renting out the castle to restaurant Château Neercanne since the 1950s, a highly renowned restaurant that has been awarded 1 or 2 Michelin stars almost continuously since 1957.

During the famous Euro Summit in 1991, which would lead to the Maastricht Treaty on 7 February 1992 (forming the current European Union with open borders and the Euro), European government leaders had lunch in the restaurant on 9 December 1991, the lunch offered by Queen Beatrix.

- The Dutch border office Neercanne was officially called Neder-Canne (see also the facade in the photos in the photo section). However, it was popularly called Neercanne, just like the château that was called Neercanne.

- The office building dates from 1894 and was built in an eclectic architectural style influenced by the chalet style (eclecticism = in architecture a free combination of different historical building styles or movements brought together in 1 building).

- In 1923 a border post was set up in the building.

- Since 6 February 1977 the building is officially a Dutch National Monument under monument number 506633 with the name Customs Office Tram Station Neder-Canne.

- In 1894 the building was built as a stop with a waiting facility for passengers of the Maastricht – Kanne tram line, which opened around that time. In Kanne the line reconnected with the line to Glons. The construction of the line was a collaboration between the city of Maastricht and the Belgian Tram Company. The exploitation started in 1894 with the aim of restoring a part of the connection with the Belgian hinterland lost due to the Belgian independence. The line, which partly ran along the Cannerweg, remained in use until the end of 1939.

- In June - July 1944, the Germans started to convert the tram rails to train rails width in order to connect to their Reichseisenbahnnetz. Those rails then continued into the Cannerberg caves, where at that time preparations were made for the mounting of V1 and V2 rockets. But the rocket assembly in the caves would not take place because of the rapid advance of the Allies which led to the retreat of the Germans from the caves in August 1944. After the liberation the rails were removed.

- A small Belgian customs post was located in Kanne, in the Kapelstraat near border post 68. The size of this small office was 5 x 4 meters and was usually manned by 2 customs officers. This customs post was closed in 1952. The Belgian customs officers then moved to their Dutch colleagues in the Neder-Canne building which then became a combined Dutch – Belgian border office.

The distance between the Belgian customs post in Kanne and the border post Neder-Canne was approximately 365 meters. Yet the border post in Kanne was not visible from Neder-Canne, as the Cannerweg made a right bend just after the castle gardens. Seeing that in 1945 in Kanne the present Statiestraat (N619) did not exist, also the Cannerweg/Kapelstraat bifurcation did not exist in 1945. All traffic had to pass through the narrow Kapelstraat. However, the old tram route ran straight from the Cannerweg to the Statieplein in Kanne.

- On his way back from Belgium to Maastricht, Ronald drove in Kanne and the last hundreds of meters in The Netherlands the exact route the Americans followed in September 1944 on their way to their liberation of Maastricht.

The Americans liberated Maastricht on 13 and 14 September 1944. They approached the city and the surrounding area from the south. The 117th and 119th regiments came via the right bank of the Maas, the 120th regiment came via the left bank of the Maas, so via the village of Kanne. The 120th crossed the Albert Canal, then arrived at the Statieplein in Kanne, then turned left into the Statiestraat, then left into the street called Boys, immediately right after the Chapel of the Holy Sepulcher into the Kapelstraat to cross the Dutch border at the small Belgian border post and then follow the bend to the left onto the Cannerweg in the direction of Maastricht.

But at the Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre a major problem arose: the bend there was very sharp and the roads very narrow. There was considerable congestion of all those vehicles of the 120th regiment. It appeared quite difficult for the larger vehicles to manoeuvre into the small Kapelstraat towards The Netherlands.

The passing of all the vehicles of the 120th regiment took almost a whole week, day and night, non-stop.

The Americans then decided to use the old tram route to drive directly from the Statieplein to the Cannerweg. But it only became a real street much later.

- The Bureau Militair Gezag (Military Authority Bureau), abbreviated to MG, was a Dutch institution set up in 1944 by the Dutch government in London. The military authority's task was to fill the power vacuum that had arisen concerning the civil authorities in the liberated areas in The Netherlands.

After the liberation of Maastricht on 14 September 1944 the Military Authority Bureau was the first to be active in that region. In Limburg the Bureau acted as a kind of testing ground for all MGs in the country yet to be set up afterwards.

Eventually each province was subdivided into several MG districts and each district was headed by a District Military Commissioner who liaised with mayors and other local administrators.

Tasks of the MG included purging the public administration, guarding German prisoners of war, regulating traffic, surrendering captured weapons, opening up banks and suppressing the black market. The Political Investigation Service, as well as the Border Guard Corps was placed under the responsibility of the MG.

- The rifle with which the soldier of the Military Authority fired his shots was an American M1 Garand, technical name U.S. Rifle, Caliber 30-06, M1. The bullets had the caliber 0.30 inch = 7.62 x 63 mm.

This semi-automatic weapon was developed in the 1920s and 1930s by John Garand in the Springfield Armory factory in Springfield and was introduced to the US military in 1936. The Americans even called it *The rifle that won the war*.

Production lasted until 1957, after which the rifle was used by the Americans until the 1970s during the Vietnam War.

Immediately after the Second World War this rifle also became available to the European allies of the United States, including The Netherlands and its soldiers operating under the Bureau Militair Gezag.

- The village of Margraten is located in the far south of Limburg and is located on the Plateau of Margraten, an area whose subsoil consists of limestone (marl) covered by loess soil.

- The Margraten cemetery, where Ronald was temporarily buried after his death, is an American war cemetery located on the N278 national road between the villages of Margraten and Cadier en Keer. Officially the cemetery is called Amerikaanse Begraafplaats Margraten, in English it is called The Netherlands American Cemetery and Memorial.

The cemetery was created by the request of Captain Shomon, Commander of the 611th Graves Registration Company (611th GRC), in October 1944 to the municipality of Margraten (which had just been liberated at the time) to make an area available as a cemetery for the expected high numbers of American deaths during the advance to Berlin. The Americans preferred not to bury their dead soldiers on German soil. The municipality of Margraten immediately made an area of 30 hectares available. Construction started in November 1944.

In 1947 the then Dutch government ceded the land to the United States for eternal use out of gratitude for the American liberators and respect for the American casualties. At that time 18,000 Americans were buried in Margraten, which required a redesign of the cemetery. During that process the remains of some 10,000 men buried at Margraten were transferred to the United States and reburied there. The remains of Ronald, him being British and not American, were transferred to the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery in Overloon. Since that time Margraten has held 8,301 graves with 8,302 buried American soldiers. Two unknown soldiers are buried in 1 grave.

- The men of 611th GRC were assigned to the various units of the US 9th Army. Their task was to store the human remains at the sites, to register the details of the dead soldiers and to transfer the bodies and remains to Margraten via collection points.

When the remains arrived in Margraten, they were stripped of ammunition and personal belongings on the so-called stripping line. Afterwards, the remains were buried there by the 960th Quartermaster Service Company. From mid-December 1944 that task was taken over by the 3136th Quartermaster Service company.

Both companies consisted of black American soldiers, who were partly stationed in castle Neercanne. For many residents of South Limburg these were the first black people they saw in their lives. During their stay in castle Neercanne these soldiers sometimes fired their rifles at German V1 rockets which flew over and which were launched in Germany to hit the targets in England.

- The Distinguished Service Order (DSO) is a senior British military decoration established by Queen Victoria on 6 September 1886 and was awarded for the first time on 25 November 1886.

The award applies to meritorious and courageous actions by officers during a war or war conflict.

The reigning Head of State of the United Kingdom is the Grand Master of the Order and the servicemen to whom that award is presented are officially called members.

These members may use the letters D.S.O. after their own name. Most often the DSO was awarded to the rank of Majors and above, but in some cases also to courageous junior officers. In 1993 the British award system was revised, the Conspicuous Gallantry Cross was introduced as a new award and the DSO was again reserved for officers in the higher ranks only.

The DSO is also awarded in other parts of the British Commonwealth.

The photos:



Ronald Crouch
(Photo: Collection Jamie Gibbons)



Ronald Crouch
(Photo: Collection Jamie Gibbons)



The Cannerweg in South Limburg with the marked locations:

1. Yellow = present border crossing The Netherlands – Belgium. In 1945 this border crossing did not exist, nor did the bifurcation of the road.
2. White = in 1945 the border crossing between the Netherlands and Belgium was located here in the Kapelstraat and the Belgian border office Kanne was located at this point, at border post 68 in the Kapelstraat.
3. Red = location Château Neercanne.
4. Green = in 1945 the location of the Dutch border office Neder-Canne, about 365 meters from the Belgian border office.

5. *Blue = in 1945 the location where Ronald's Jeep came to a stop, about 270 meters from the border office Neder-Canne.
About 30 meters after the start of that bend, the road disappears from view when looking from the front door of the border office.
At that time, 1945, there was a forest of Canadian poplars on the right of the road and brush growing on the edge of it towards the road. After this bend it is about 3 kilometers to the city of Maastricht.*

(Source: Google Earth, original satellite image 8 August 2020 by Landsat Copernicus)

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Château Neercanne on the Cannerweg. Photo taken from the terrace garden.

(Photo: Wikimedia/photographer: Jos Odekerken)

In this photo no photo changes or photo adjustments were made by Stichting Overloon War Chronicles / Overloon War Chronicles Foundation

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Commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chateau_Neercanne_Rijks_1019256.jpg

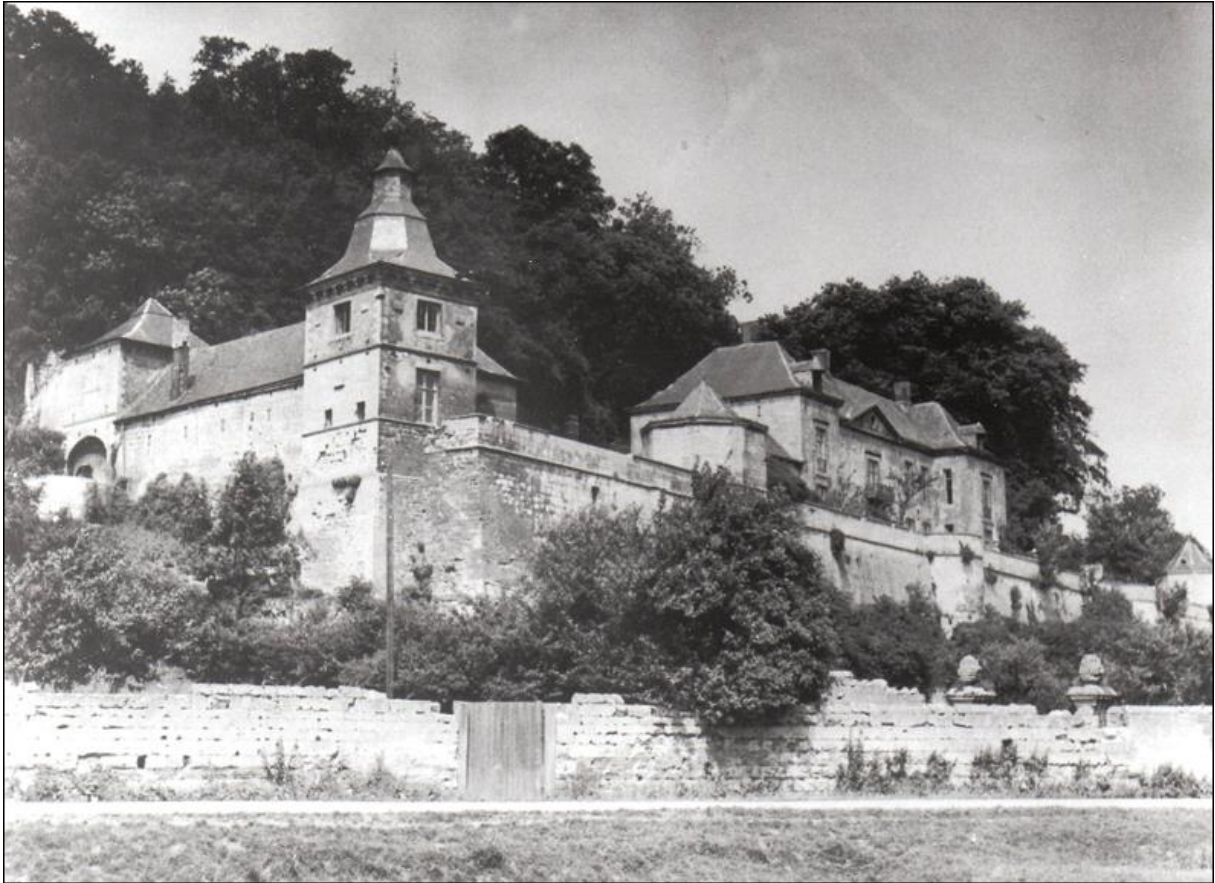


Château Neercanne. In the background border office Neder-Canne.

(Photo: Wikimedia/Photographer: Bert Kaufmann)

In this photo no photo changes or photo adjustments were made by the Stichting Overloon War Chronicles / Overloon War Chronicles Foundation

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[Commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ch%C3%A2teau_Neercanne_Neercanne_Castle_\(Explore\)_\(6317792842\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ch%C3%A2teau_Neercanne_Neercanne_Castle_(Explore)_(6317792842).jpg)*



*Photo of Castle Neder-Canne, made in June/July 1944 by a German soldier who was working in the caves of the Cannerberg. Preparations were then made in those caves for the final assembly of V1/V2 missiles. The assembly phase of the missiles was not reached because of the rapid advance of the Allies towards The Netherlands. The Germans left the caves at the end of August 1944.
(Photo: Collection Din Hoogma)*



*Dutch border office Neder - Canne (1945) on the Cannerweg.
Left to Maastricht (The Netherlands), right to Kanne (Belgium).
(Photo: Collection Din Hoogma)*



*The border office Neder-Canne (1965).
As from 1952 the Dutch and Belgian customs officers shared the building, see also both the
Dutch and Belgian flag in the picture.
(Photo: Collection Din Hoogma)*



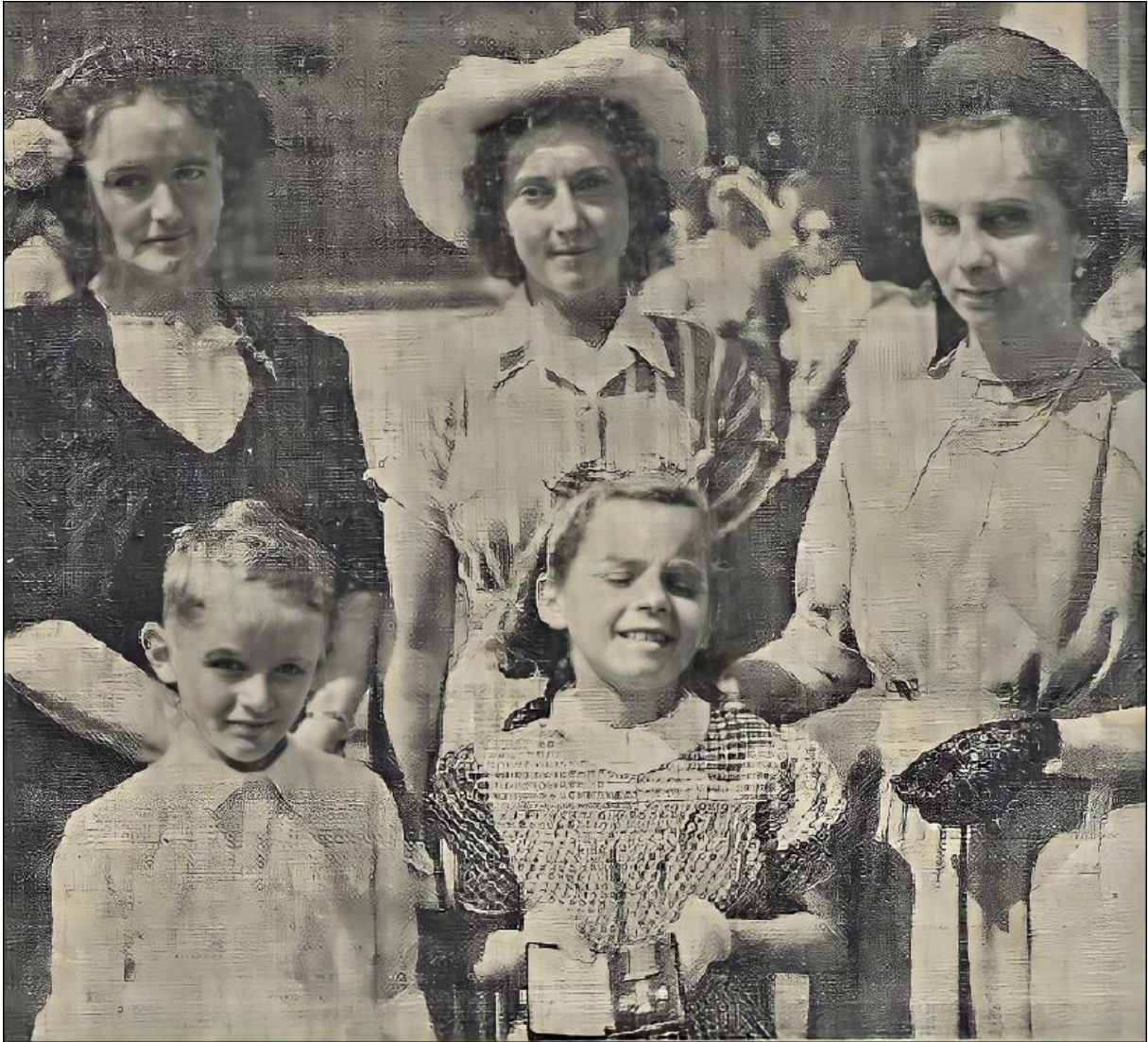
Posthumous awarding of the Military Cross to the late Ronald Crouch at Buckingham Palace in London in 1946.

In this photo from left to right: Elizabeth Crouch, Roberta Crouch posing with the Military Cross, Ronald's father Ernest Crouch and Elizabeth's mother Mrs Jones.

(Photo: British newspaper article, 1946, Collection Jamie Gibbons)



*Elizabeth Crouch with the Military Cross, after the award ceremony at Buckingham Palace.
(Photo: British newspaper article, 1946, Collection Jamie Gibbons)*



Posthumous presentation of the DSO (Distinguished Service Order) to the late Ronald Crouch at Buckingham Palace in London, Wednesday 1 June 1949. In this photo from left to right: Mrs Jones (sister of Elizabeth Crouch), nephew Douglas Jones, friend Beatrice Roach, daughter Roberta Crouch posing with the DSO and Elizabeth Crouch.

(Photo: British newspaper article, 1949, Collection Jamie Gibbons)



*Ronald Crouch's tombstone in the CWGC Cemetery in Overloon.
See also the additions after Ronald Crouch's name: DSO and MC.
These refer to the awarded Distinguished Service Order and Military Cross, of which the distinguished servicemen may officially use the letters DSO and MC after their name.
(Photo: Collection Leo Janssen)*

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Thanks to: Jane Hope

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The Overloon War Chronicles Foundation aims, among other things, to retrieve the photos and stories of as many graves as possible in the CWGC cemetery, to pay tribute to the fallen there and thus keep this history alive. More information about the project and the Overloon War Chronicles Foundation at:

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