

# 1LT Gatse Jacobus (Bob) Tiemstra

1923-2010

(Interpreter, 508<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment  
82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division)

Gatse Jacobus Tiemstra was born in Nijmegen on 14 May 1923 to Jan Sjoerd Tiemstra and Margje Burggraaf. Gatse's Grandfather, "old" Gatse Tiemstra, innovative entrepreneur, bought the company from his employer, M. Wijers, and after several name changes, it became known as NV Aannemersbedrijf. When Gatse Senior retired in 1930, the company was then run by brothers Jan Sjoerd and Dornelis until Gatse the younger bought it around 1955. Decades later in 1978, he donated a decorative lamp post to the city of Nijmegen in honor of his grandfather's company and as a display of family loyalty to Holland's sovereignty by refusing to work for the Germans during WWII.



508th Parachute  
Infantry Regiment

During WWII occupation, Tiemstra refused to complete his one-year internship at the Employment Service, Netherlands Forced Labor equivalent, and hid in the attic of his childhood home at 17 Balistraat because Germans were billeted on the first floor. There he witnessed the beginning of Operation Market Garden and feared conscription realities. Fortunately, his parents were friends with the family of Captain Arie Bestebreurtje and requested that Gatse report to him at his quarters in Groesbeekseweg. Captain Arie Dirk "Harry" Besterbreurtje was a much-celebrated and highly decorated Dutch military patriot. As commanding officer of a *Jedburgh Team*, a Liaison Unit between



82nd Airborne Division

underground partisans and Allied forces attached to the 82nd Airborne Division on 10 September 1944, its function was to assist that unit in its invasion of the Netherlands. Through Arie's influence, Tiemstra and his friend, Hans Schoon, were able to join the 82<sup>nd</sup> US Airborne Division, Tiemstra as an interpreter and guide. His multilingual and native skills provided the Americans with much-needed military advantages: interrogating suspicious Dutch and Germans civilians and military personnel and possessing extensive knowledge of area geography.

During action at Driel with the 508<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment in October 1944, Tiemstra and Schoon were ambushed south of the Arnhem Bridge on 6 October 1944. Tiemstra hid his actual identity by using his alias, Garhardus

Terpstra, as a Dutch non-combatant until the end of the war or he (and perhaps his family) would have been shot as terrorists. Tiemstra recounted his WWII POW experiences in the 2010 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter "THE ITEM":

*I was imprisoned by the Germans running into an ambush directly south of the Arnhem Bridge at 06-10-'44, some GIs and a good friend of mine were k.i.a. I had luck to slip into a foxhole, but was made P.O.W. in the afternoon, too early to escape during the night. As an interpreter and guide, completely dressed/attired as a USA soldier, with a SHAEF patch on my jacket, I impressed the Germans by speaking, being interpreter, their language, as instructed by the liaison officer Harry Bestebreurtje (Jedburghteam) gave my (fake) serial number, name and rank (1st Lt.!!!!) because I did not want to be employed for forced labor, as I had been avoiding during the occupation and knew that the Germans used P.O.W. noncoms and soldiers as such. After at least 3 weeks of interrogations, Stalag Limburg a/d/Lahn, Dietzcastle and numerous railway kilometers in heavy guarded cattle cars, I, with some 100 officers, arrived in Schubin. During the whole period, I had been speaking with the German guards their native language, during interrogations and especially during the "cattle car railroad trips" to obtain some food for my hungry, and almost starving, companions, trading cigarettes etc.*

*Arrived in Oflag 64, the staff under Col. Goode did not trust me, which was understandable as I found out later; there was something to hide. After having told my whole story and some more interrogations and conversations, my position was saved by witness of Lt. Harvey Todd who was a Jedburgh team member together with Harry Bestebreurtje, at the Arnhem bridge,*



Tiemstra posing as Gerhardus Terpstra

*and spoke out that my "story" could certainly be acceptable. After some days, evidently there had been contact by vhf, I was trusted, and your people vouched for me, even when some notorious German secret search tried to collect some more information about my status.*

*The story of the population of Oflag 64 from 21-01-'45 is well known by now, most of them, under command of Col. Goode were driven by the "boche" to southern Germany, Camp Hammelburg. Lt. Harvey Todd, who actually saved my life between Schubin and Usedom, was within that group. But one aspect is not highlighted enough. There was a group of about 100 sick and poor P.O.W.s which, under command of Lt. Col. Van Vliet stayed behind a couple of days at the German marine establishment Usedom, and was transported to*

*Luckenwalde Stalag IIIA in 3 open coal wagons by rail, a nasty trip that took about a week during which week I acted as interpreter, caretaker etc. to help the poorest and most sickened men. Luckenwalde was liberated by the Russians. Lt. Col Van Vliet gave me a compliment for the caretaking during the "railway trip."*

When he returned to Nijmegen, a Dutch officer who had a business relationship with his family dissuaded him from his intention to fight against the Japanese in Dutch West Indies. Having made this decision, Tiemstra completed his education at Hogere Burgers School (HBS-Higher Civic School), a secondary school in the Netherlands and Dutch Empire which offered 5-6-year programs, and assisted his father in rebuilding Holland landmarks, many of which were greatly damaged or destroyed during the War.

The company became very involved in multiple projects within and outside of Nijmegen. This list includes the Mennonite Church, Town Hall, Nijmegen Lyceum, Blind Institute St. Henricus, buildings of the Radboud Hospital, and the establishment of the Liberation Museum in Groesbeek, just to name a few.

Tiemstra's private life included his marriage to Hannie Gorter on January 14, 1959 in Kortenhoef. In 1988 he moved his family to Switzerland, returning to Kortenhoef at a later date. He also had a villa in his hometown, Sneek, Holland, a picturesque city known for its waterways.

In 1983, he was appointed an Officer of the Orange-Nassau (a civil and military Dutch order of chivalry).

Tiemstra passed in Sneek on 14 February 2010. He is survived by his wife, children, and grandchildren.

Biography written by Kriegy Research Group writer Ann C. Rogers