

Historic Dutch Forces – Princess Irene's Brigade

The Royal Netherlands Motorized Infantry Brigade was initially formed from approximately 1500 Dutch troops, including a small group guarding German POWs who arrived in the UK in May 1940 following the collapse of the Netherlands.

After May 1940 the Brigade was established in England from Netherlands military personnel that has escaped from the Netherlands, from Dutchmen who had been recruited in England, America, Canada and South Africa, and from volunteers



Elements of this force became the nucleus of what was originally called the "Dutch Legion." Although augmented by conscription among overseas citizens, the Dutch force also detached troops for other duties and as a consequence grew very slowly.

At the beginning of 1941 the unit was renamed "Royal Netherlands Brigade" and by the end of the year received the honorific "Princess Irene's" title.

Efforts to form a complete brigade (regiment), reinforced with artillery and a tank unit were not successful. In the end the brigade included:

Headquarters, three motorized infantry companies (companies with machineguns, mortars, antitank-guns and light AA), The 2nd combat team consisted mainly of mariners, who had been trained in the USA.

a reconnaissance unit (equipped with Daimler Scout cars and White Scout cars),

an artillery battery and the train.

In July 1943 the Brigade (under the command of Lieutenant Colonel A.C. de Ruyter van Steveninck) was assigned to the XXIst Army Group. They were trained together with British units, and assigned to the coastal defence in the neighbourhood of Harwich.



image courtesy of <http://www.prinsesirenebrigade.nl/>

August to September '44:

Both brigades were under the command of 6th Airborne Division (British I Corps), which also included 1st & 4th Special Service (Commando) Brigades. Both brigades were positioned on the left flank, along with 6th Airlanding Brigade, so an Airlanding Infantry Battalion would be the most likely attachment. At one point, the Belgian Armoured Car Squadron was attached to the 6th Airborne Armoured Recce Regiment and the Dutch Brigade had 'A' Squadron of the 6th Airborne Armoured Recce Regiment (twelve Cromwell IVs) under command

On August 6 1944 the Brigade embarked, and on August 7 and 8 it disembarked in Normandy, where it was assigned to the 6th Airborne Division, east of the Orne, August 12 it took up a frontline position.

From August 17-31 1944 the Brigade took part in the advance towards the Seine, and on August 26 it was the first unit to occupy Pont Audemer.

After rapid marches via Brussels the Albert Canal near Beringen was reached, where the Brigade took an active part in the combat with the British 2nd Army, crossing onto Dutch soil on 20 September

During operation Market Garden, which was started on September 17th. the Brigade was transferred to Grave on September 20th and 21th.

In the neighbourhood of this town it carried out guard en reconnaissance duties until October 17th.

Then the Brigade moved to the Wilhelmina Canal, south of Oirschot, and was assigned to the 15th Scottish Division. It took part in the operations during which the enemy forces were expelled from Central- and Western Brabant.



September to October '44:

Initially, both brigades were earmarked to spearhead the assault into Le Havre, but the orders were cancelled and the brigades were transferred to the Guards Armoured Division (British XXX Corps) for the liberation of France and Belgium. However, the brigades soon went their separate ways, with the Dutch going into Holland with 43rd (Wessex) Division, 50th (Northumbria) Division and 8th Armoured Brigade (all belonging to XXX Corps with whom the Dutch remained until the end of the war).

The Belgians stayed in Belgium during much of September to complete the liberation of their country alongside 15th (Scottish) Division and 8th Armoured Brigade.

The Belgians were sent once again to the front on 22nd September, being attached to British VIII Corps on the right flank of 21st Army Group (except for the Artillery Battery and Armoured Car Squadron, who remained with XXX Corps).

On 29th September, they were transferred to the US XIX Corps, 1st US Army (which was temporarily part of 21st Army Group), and had a detachment of US Shermans, Stuarts and Tank Destroyers under command, led by one Lt Col Elms (US 7th Armoured Division?).

Attachments for both brigades in this period could therefore be extremely varied - including all manner of British units and US armour (for the Belgians) or US Airborne (for the Dutch)

On October 25th and 26th an attack position opposite of Broekhoven was taken after prolonged fights for the attack on Tilburg.

After the liberation of Tilburg the Brigade was transferred successively to the neighbourhood of Weelde, Rijen and Raamsdonk.

November '44 to March '45:

Then from November 5th – 11th, it was charged with the guarding of the Maas in the neighbourhood of Waalwijk. On November 9th the Brigadecommander was promoted to the rank of Colonel.

The Belgians returned to the British VIII Corps on the 1st, being placed under the command of 53rd (Welch) Division.

They returned to Belgium on the 17th, for a period of training and expansion to full brigade strength.

After the Brigade had moved to Wuustwezel in Belgium on November 11th, it was transferred to Zeeland, where guard duties were carried out during the whole winter, especially in Noord-Beveland and Walcheren.



The 'Princess Irenes' remained in the Netherlands throughout the winter, engaged in extensive patrolling and skirmishing, including an unpleasant period spent on 'The Island' (Bettuwe), north of Nijmegen. Around this time it was involved in combat with the Dutch volunteer SS formation Landstorm Nederland. The Dutch followed the rest of 21st Army Group into Germany in February and March '45. Attachments for this period would largely consist of British infantry, possibly with some tank support, involved in patrolling and probing missions (and countering those of the Germans) in very soggy terrain.

March '45:

In March 1945 Her Majesty the Queen visited Walcheren and the Irene Brigade. The mariners contingent was re-assigned and left on March 31st. This was part of a reorganisation that implied the disbandment of the reconnaissance unit.

April '45:

The Belgians returned to the war as a full, reinforced infantry brigade (as British infantry brigade organisation, with organic armoured cars and artillery).

On 4th April, they were placed under the command of 51st (Highland) Division (Canadian II Corps). On 10th April, Brigadier Piron was ordered to detach his 2nd Infantry Battalion and his artillery, which was to come under the command of 4th Special Service Brigade.

Between April 10th and 14th 1945, when the allied advance in the eastern Netherlands and Germany was in full progress, the Brigade was released by a battalion of the Belgian Brigade, and transferred to the Maas, district Heusden and Hedel.

Later that month, the 2nd Battalion found itself being passed from pillar-to-post, being attached variously to 116th Royal Marine Brigade and 33rd Armoured Brigade (Kangaroos and Buffaloes).

The Brigade captured a bridgehead in Hedel on April 23rd for the advance in the Bommelerwaard. It managed to hold the bridgehead in spite of heavy enemy attacks, however, when relative orders were received, the Brigade withdrew to the South of the Maas

The advance could not be effected.

On May 4th the Brigade was released by the 308th Infantry Brigade. After the capitulation of the enemy forces on May 5th the Brigade transferred to Wageningen. On May 8th it left for The Hague, where it entered as the first allied unit.

By the end of 1945 the Irene Brigade was disbanded, and on April 15th 1946 the Princess Irene Regiment (later on Guards Regiment) was established, which still continues the traditions of the Brigade.



Dingo Scout Car F329636

Vehicle Markings for the Princess Irene brigade were as follows :

109 Brigade HQ, white numbers on black square

109 Brigade Signals Company, RED numbers on white over blue square

109 Independent Work Detachment, white numbers on blue over yellow over red square

110 Nr. 1 Independent Fighting Unit, white numbers on red square

111 Nr. 2 Independent Fighting Unit, white numbers on red square

112 Nr. 3 Independent Fighting Unit, white numbers on red square

113 Reinforcement Detachment (November 1944 onwards), white numbers on red square

114 not used by Dutch

115 not used by Dutch

116 not used by Dutch

117 not used by Dutch

118 Supply Company ("Brigade Train"), white numbers on red over green square

(disputable, according to curator PIB museum could also have been a complete green square)

119 Provost Section, white numbers on black square

(disputable, according to curator PIB museum they didn't exist!!)

138 Reconnaissance Section, white numbers on green over yellow square



Image courtesy of the IWM film section

Description: Liberation of Beuvrijding by the Royal Netherlands Brigade - Princess Irene Brigade on 6th-August-1944



Image courtesy of the IWM B 10052 & 10049
NW Europe

Photographer : Sgt Laing :War Office official photographer

Description: With the Nederland's Liberation Army on exercise.

This was the first recce car to go into Dutch territory when it was scouting out positions for advanced troops,
and entered (Maarheritt in the Province of south Limbray) 15th Sept 1955

The Driver is Dvr.Oppenheim of Dutch forces.

18.9.1944



Image courtesy of the Ferdinand Von Boomen

Photographer : Unknown

Description: Dingo Dutch Prinses Irene Brigade in Velp on their way to Nijmegen.
September 1944

For further information, the following websites are recommended

web site <http://www.prinsesirenebrigade.nl>