



# SUNSET MARCH

## 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

Sunset March #2632 up to and including #2996



## Acknowledgements

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Photo on front page:  
Nijmegen silver Medal of Honour,  
issued by the Mayor of Nijmegen on 26  
March 2022 during the annual Team31  
meeting. (Photography: Kees  
Bleijerveld)

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Figure 1: Renewed plaque on the "Oversteek" bridge with view of the Waal Bridge (Photography Kees Bleijerveld)

## **1. Introduction**

The start of the year 2022 was still dominated by COVID-19, but after a short period of time many restrictive measures concerned with this virus were lifted and it was widely felt as a relief that nearly all Sunset March activities could be carried out as planned. After two years of restraint, we were at last allowed to march the Crossing again, on our own or in small or large groups the way we used to do. Apart from our "core business", the 365 daily Sunset Marches, a sufficient number of other special events can be mentioned. Some highlights of last year were: the appointment of the new president, the presentation of the Silver Medal of Honour, with the accompanying gold Waal Bridge Pin, the presentation of the Certificate of Appreciation to Tim Ruijling by the American Embassy, a Peace Week full of activities in September, unveiling an LRE-Vector (Liberation Route Europe) near the Crossing and the complete renovation of the lights of the "Lights Crossing" light monument which also included making it less failure-prone.

## **2. What is Sunset March?**

### **Start**

Sunset March is an initiative by a number of veterans from the Overbetuwe region (website: <http://www.veteranenoverbetuwe.nl/Home>). During a regular meeting of Overbetuwe Veterans on 27 September 2014 the plan was conceived to investigate whether it would be possible to use the new "Lights Crossing" light monument on the new Nijmegen city bridge, "The Crossing", in order to realize a living and daily tribute to our allied liberators.

This initiative is aimed at commemorating the sacrifice American soldiers made here for our freedom far away from their homes. It is also especially aimed at making a visible bridge to all veterans who have contributed and still contribute to peace and safety in missions all over the world. This idea was immediately widely welcomed and after the website created for this was made operational, the first SUNSET MARCH was walked on Sunday 19 October 2014. The five initiators "from day one" are: Henk Hanenburg, Wim van Mierlo, Douwe Osinga, Tim Ruijling and Dirk-Jan van Zuidam. The Foundation Board was extended by Kees Bleijerveld, George de Jongh, René Scheeres, Wim van Zijl and Peter Grotens. Since 11 November 2015 Sunset March has been a foundation with the cultural ANBI status (Dutch: Algemeen Nut Beogende Instelling; English: Public Benefit Organization). In 2020 the Sunset March was incorporated in the Immaterial Heritage Network Netherlands. Immaterial Heritage Netherlands is a group of cultural institutions, which are felt to be heritage by communities and which create a feeling of identity and continuity.

### **How does it work?**

In Nijmegen a new city bridge was built in 2013; "the Crossing", very close to the river Waal section where American soldiers of the US 82nd Airborne Division crossed the river Waal to the north bank on 20 September 1944. This event is considered as one of the most heroic actions of the Second World War and owes its fame partly to the famous war movie "A Bridge too Far" by Cornelius Ryan.

During this so-called Waal Crossing 48 American soldiers were killed. On the bridge Atelier Veldwerk realized a light monument, called Lights Crossing. This light monument on the new bridge is very special. On the bridge there are 48 pairs of light posts, one pair per American soldier killed.

Around sunset these light posts are illuminated one after the other, pair by pair and at walking pace. Illuminating all of them takes nearly 12 minutes. The first pair that is lit is located right under the southern arch of the bridge, the inverted letter V. Every evening at sunset a volunteer walks the Sunset March across the bridge from south to north.

When the first pair of light posts is lit, the veteran starts walking at the pace with which the lights are illuminated. When the other side of the river Waal has been reached, there is a stop at the Waal Crossing Monument "The Crossing" and the salute is given. Very often school classes, groups of friends or interested citizens join the "Veteran of the Day" and walk the Crossing as well. Officials and executives of national veteran organizations regularly join the Sunset March walkers. On special occasions and on remembrance days The Sunset March is very often walked by large groups of interested people and other participants. In those cases a bugler plays Taps and wreaths and flowers are laid near the monument. Every year there are a number of fixed special moments: on 22 February for a German delegation, on 4 and 5 May (Remembrance Day and Liberation Day), the Four Day Marches week, 20 September, 19 October (Sunset March Anniversary) and 11 November (International Veterans Day/ Remembrance Day).

Veterans, who have been registered as "Veteran of the Day" receive a unique numbered certificate after having marched the Sunset March for the first time. On any one day only one veteran can be "Veteran of the Day" and only one numbered certificate is issued on any one day, even if more veterans walk the March.

### **Social media**

On the Sunset March website (<https://www.sunsetmarch.nl>) veterans can register in order to walk the Sunset March. On the website a large number of interesting facts can be found: objective and method, register of veteran walkers, foundation data, walkers' experiences, photographs and videos. Sunset March can also be found on Facebook. The Facebook page is used for announcements, impressions and comments on (special) Sunset Marches. On LinkedIn there is the Sunset March group where LinkedIn members can register.

### **Board and Team31**

The Board consists of 10 persons, among whom the 5 "Founding Fathers". On 25 February the hand-over of the presidency, which had long before been announced, took place during a special board meeting. Tim Ruijling figuratively handed over the president's gavel to Peter Grotens. As yet Tim will remain a member of the board as vice president of the executive committee. The board is charged with coordinating, planning and managing all activities. In addition, it monitors the basic principles of the Sunset March. In case at a given date the registration of a veteran through the website is in arrears, a reserve from the board or someone from Team31 will take over and walk the March.

Team31 is a group of veterans (31) who are prepared and willing to regularly act as veteran of the day. This group of "regular walkers" is essential for the existence of the Sunset March. They come from the Nijmegen region for the greater part, but there are also active members from places like Zwolle, Dronten and Zevenbergen. At present there is a waiting list for people opting to be members of Team31.

The names of the Team31 members can be found on the website. Team31 has an international touch with a German, a French and a Norwegian veteran. Last year two members of Team31 stepped back, on account of their move. One of them was an American. In order to replace them the board will appoint two new members from the waiting list next year.





Figure 2 : Group photo in the garden of the Fletcher Hotel Erica with Mayor Bruls on Team31 Day, after the presentation of the Medal of Honour (Photography: Henk Baron)

By tradition a Team31 Day takes place in Fletcher Hotel Erica in Berg en Dal on the third Saturday in January. That is the day on which all people directly involved in the Sunset March can meet each other again in an informal setting. Since corona measures were still in place last January this meeting was held on 26 March. The meeting got a very special touch by the unexpected visit by Mayor Hubert Bruls who came to present the Silver Medal of Honour and accompanying gold Waal Bridge Pin. After that Mr Wiel Lenders (Liberation Museum manager) held a speech about the realization of the new Liberation Museum at Groesbeek and about the role of the WWII Info Centre in Nijmegen. After that veteran couple Hendrik-Jan and Jacqueline van Tilburg-van Griensven told about their relation with the veteran community and about what it takes to be veteran volunteers.

In short: it was again a successful meeting

### 3. Veterans acting as “Veteran of the Day” in 2022.

The veteran who registers on the website in order to walk on anyone day of the 365 (or 366) days is called “Veteran of the Day”. From 1 January up to and including 31 December 2022 93 veterans, who did not receive a certificate before, registered as “Veteran of the Day”. Every veteran who walks the Sunset March for the first time is awarded a certificate



Figure 3: Nijmegen Medal of Honour and accompanying Certificate (Photography Peter Grotens)

with a unique number, the name, the date and time of his/her Sunset March. It will be sent to him/her by mail. The names of all the Veterans of the Day are stated in a separate register on the website, together with their nationalities. On 4 January 2022 the first “new” veteran (Patrick de Groot), walked the Sunset March. He received certificate number 655. On 29 December the last “new” Veteran of the Day in the year 2022 (Dolf Klijn), walked the Sunset March. He received certificate number 747. The percentage of veterans who received a certificate increased from 18% in 2020 and from nearly 20% in 2021, the two corona years, to the regular level of approximately 25% of the total number of Sunset Marches. In the overall time of the existence of the Sunset March (2996 days on 31 December 2022) 747 certificates were issued.

## 4. Maintenance work in 2022

### Oosterhoutsedijk dike reinforcement

On the Oosterhoutsedijk, close to the Crossing, there is the Waal Monument, where at the end of the Sunset March, the salute of honour is given. After the end of the summer of 2021 the reinforcement work to the Oosterhoutsedijk was started. The work was continued during the greater part of 2022. It was only possible to walk on the dike by opening the gate in the fence using a safety code lock. The work made walking on the dike very troublesome or it was badly passable during the greater part of the year. The Veteran of the Day received the code, so that the Sunset March could be ceremonially closed at the monument. During the work there was proper consultation with the Nijmegen Municipality and the contractors. During special Sunset Marches, after consultation, the contractors kept the monument clear. At the end of the summer/start of the autumn (just before 20 September) the work was completed and the fences were removed.



Figure 4 : Work around the monument during the dike reinforcement (Photography: Henk Hanenburg/Douwe Osinga)

### Maintenance work to the “Crossing” bridge

From 27 July to 29 August construction company BAM performed major maintenance work on the bridge. The work also included adapting and repairing the lights of the “Lights Crossing” light monument. The system was equipped with double fuses and the beam lighting was repaired. The system malfunctions have been rectified.

Moreover, the timer has been reset, so that from that time onwards all Sunset Marches will commence at the correct time as stated on the website, which was not the case in the past. This may definitely be called an improvement and more importantly, there will be less risk of malfunctions. The plaque on the bridge, which had been damaged twice, was renovated and mounted on the bridge as well.

In this way the renovated and raised road surface, the parking place, the improved lighting and the new plaque have all contributed to a high level of satisfaction about the maintenance work that was carried out. In the next few years we will now be able to hold our daily ceremony in surroundings that meet the requirements of the time.

## 5. 2022 Activities

### Board Meetings

In the past year there were 5 board meetings. These meetings were held on the Saturdays of 12 February, 23 April, 20 August and 29 October. A special meeting was furthermore held on Friday 25 February, when Tim Ruijling officially handed over the presidency to Peter Grotens. All meetings took again place at our sponsor's Dirksen Opleidingen at Elst.

The executive committee met on 5 February, 16 April and 20 October.

### Cooperation

This year the activities of the Sunset March were again supported by a large number of authorities and organizations. Existing partnerships were continued and perpetuated; others were revived. Gifts, donations and sponsoring made it again possible to realize the planned events this year. It stands to reason that we highly appreciate this and wish to express our thanks again to all our sponsors and partners. Obviously, we hope that this relationship will be continued.

Our sponsors are:

- |                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| ➤ Veterans Institute          | ➤ Friendship Albany Nijmegen foundation          |
| ➤ Dirksen Opleidingen         |  |
| ➤ Comenius Course             | ➤ Atelier Veldwerk                               |
| ➤ Jaleesa Derksen Photography | ➤ Fletcher Hotels Berg en Dal                    |
| ➤ VFonds                      | ➤ BAM Infra                                      |
| ➤ De 4Day Marches Foundation  | ➤ 11th Airmobile Brigade                         |
| ➤ Liberation Route Europe     | ➤ 82nd Airborne Division                         |
| ➤ Armed Forces Military Music | ➤ Honorary Consul in Cleves, Germany             |
| ➤ Kersten Retail Elst         |  |
| ➤ VSI                         | ➤ and many departments of Nijmegen Municipality. |

### Special Sunset Marches and special dates

Every day of the year 2022 Sunset Marches were walked, in all weathers. Although hardly hindered by COVID restrictions, the closure and the maintenance work of the Oosterhoutsedijk still constituted a restrictive factor until mid-September.

Sunset Marches in 2022 worth mentioning are among others:

- ✓ 21 February: A large delegation of Team31 and the board walked on the occasion of Tim Ruijling's farewell as president.
- ✓ 22 February: A large German delegation of the Cleves business club walked the March accompanied by a delegation of international soldiers from Uedem (D) and Kalkar(D), who had laid a wreath at the Schommel (Swing) monument, in remembrance of the bombardment of 22 February 1944, earlier on that day.





Figure 5 : Laying wreaths at the monument by the German delegation in remembrance of the mistaken bombardment on 22 February 1944 (photo left: Team31 member Michael Pollmann) (Photography: José de Baan)

- ✓ On 25 February the official hand-over of the presidency of the Sunset March Foundation took place at a special board meeting.
- ✓ On 26 March the annual meeting of Team31 and the board meeting took place. It had been postponed on account of COVID-19. During this meeting Mayor Bruls of Nijmegen presented the silver Medal of Honour and the accompanying gold Waal Bridge Pin to the Sunset March.



Figure 6: Presentation Nijmegen Medal of Honour by Mayor Bruls to Peter Grotens (Photography: George de Jongh)

- ✓ On 11 April a delegation of Radboud University and Radboud UMC, led by Rector Magnificus Han van Krieken, walked and completed the Sunset March in a dignified manner. On 11 April it is commemorated that the German occupier closed the university on that day in 1943, because of the fact that the staff did not show loyalty towards the occupier.



- ✓ 19 April. The resigned president, Tim Ruijling, received the "Certificate of Appreciation" during a meeting on the occasion of the Dutch American Friendship Day of the American Embassy in Wassenaar for his merits as founder of the Sunset March.



*Figure 7: Presentation of the Certificate of Appreciation to Tim Ruijling by the Chargé d'Affaires, Mrs Marja Verloop (Photography: Peter Grotens)*

- ✓ 4 May. In this year it was not possible to set up a "tented" camp near the monument on account of the maintenance work on the Oosterhoutsedijk. Usually, the liberation fire is delivered in the night preceding Liberation Day and is then guarded until it is transported to the liberation festival in Nijmegen the next day.
- ✓ The annual remembrance at 20.00 o'clock did however take place. The deputy Mayor of Cleves (D), Mr Josef Gietemann, delivered a speech followed by former city poet, Mrs Amal Karam, who read two short poems. Many people present then walked the Sunset March in appropriate silence.



*Figure 8: 4 May: Remembrance Ceremony at the monument (Photography: Pieter Hermans).*

- ✓ 7 May. Two former Team31 members, Denise Caspers and Jorg Elfrink officially said "I will" to one another during their wedding ceremony in America.



Figure 9: Wedding photograph former Team31-members Denise and Jorg (Photography by courtesy of Jorg Elfrink)

- ✓ 18 June a large ISAF veterans delegation walked the Sunset March.
- ✓ 11 July. As usual, the annual Dutchbat commemorative march took place with many participants and amidst widespread interest.
- ✓ 18 July. Again this year on the Monday evening preceding the 4Day Marches in Nijmegen a large international detachment walked the Sunset March.
- ✓ Team31 member Paul in den Bosch, at the same time head Protocol of the 4Day Marches, has arranged the participation of this large international detachment for a great many years to everyone's complete satisfaction.
- ✓ 9 September. For the first time the Sunset March forms part of the Comenius Walk which is organized by the Comenius Course of the RUG (University of Groningen). Our president delivers a speech on the Sunset March for the participants.
- ✓ 10 September. A Sunset March delegation attends the unveiling of the Vector near the Crossing by the Nijmegen mayor, Hubert Bruls. The Vector is a work of art, designed by the well-known artist Daniel Libeskind, that will be installed at various historic locations on the Liberation Route Europe and on which important information about these historic spots is represented.



Figure 2: Unveiling the Vector by Nijmegen Mayor Bruls (Photography: Pieter Hermans)

- ✓ On 20 September, the Waal Crossing Commemoration Day, the Sunset March was led by Lieutenant General (US) Christopher T. Donahue, commander of the XVIII Airborne Corps, accompanied by General Gavin's daughter, Chloe Gavin and Jim Cook, the son of Major Julian Cook. As usual, a "couloir of honour" was formed by 48 pairs of 2 (ex)soldiers/veterans, a Dutch one and an American one. Many interested people attended this memorable Sunset March.
- ✓ On 27 September the Overbetuwe town council walked the Crossing
- ✓ A fact worth noting is that on 2 October WWII veteran Corporal (US) David Marshall (98) accomplished the Sunset March.
- ✓ 12 October. Veterans ombudsman, Reinier van Zutphen, walks the Sunset March accompanied by his staff.
- ✓ 19 October. Team31 member Laurent Cecillon walks the Sunset March together with 60 German Paras on the same day that a board delegation walks it on the occasion of the 8th Anniversary.
- ✓ 11 November. On this International Veterans Day a large delegation walked the bridge, accompanied by the board. A large delegation of veterans of the Technical Troops walked the March as well.
- ✓ 18 November. On the foundation day of the Veterans Royal Air Force Peace Mission Association (VmVKLu) a large delegation of air force veterans walked.

#### Other events

In addition to what was already summarized above, there was a number of activities that is also worth mentioning:

- ✓ In the summer a photograph exhibition was organized in a space in the Molenpoort shopping precinct. One of the subjects on display was the Sunset March. Over 2,000 shoppers visited the exhibition during a period of several weeks.
- ✓ After the presentation of the silver Medal of Honour and the accompanying gold Waal Bridge Pin it was decided that all members would be enabled to have an image of the gold pin embroidered on their jackets free of charge in commemoration of this unique event.
- ✓ Nearly all members have availed themselves of this opportunity.



Figurer 3: Gold Waal Bridge Pin embroidered on the jacket (Photography Peter Grotens)



- ✓ Tim Ruijling was appointed "honorary member" of the 504 PIR of the 82nd Airborne Division on 20 September.
- ✓ On the following dates promotion stands were manned in varying compositions:
  - 5 May: Wageningen
  - 24 June: Veterans Day Nijmegen
  - 25 June: National Veterans Day The Hague
  - 26 September: Royal Air Force Veterans Day Soesterberg
  - 1 October: Royal Military Police Veterans Day Apeldoorn
  - 25 November: Reunion of the B&T Stroe Transport Battalion



Figure 4: Sunset March Promotion stand during the 5 May Memorial Event in Wageningen (left René Scheeres, right Henk van Deelen) (Photography René Scheeres)

- ✓ Furthermore, especially the President and the Vice President represented the Sunset March on many relevant meetings apart from the activities during the remembrance period in in September, the Peace Week.

## 6. Media

This year the Sunset March was again given special attention in various local and national media. A brief and incomplete survey of the writing press follows here.

Articles in which Sunset March was mentioned, appeared among other things in these newspapers:

- ✓ De Telegraaf: 22 February and 21 April
- ✓ De Gelderlander: 16 March, 28 March and 27 July
- ✓ De Brug: 2 April, 9 April and 6 August
- ✓ De Wester: Issue No. 2 (April) and Issue No. 5 (October)



## 7. 2022 Finances

Sunset March Foundation has a number of fixed annual costs, they are especially the costs of domain names and the website, maintaining a specific bank account for the ANBI-status, wreaths and flowers for the memorial events, team projects and promotional activities. The remaining costs are variable and are adapted annually and determined by the board. Beside the support in the field of materials by the Nijmegen Municipality a considerable donation was received from an anonymous benefactor. In addition, a number of small donations and allowances was received, mostly from private people.

This year our participation to the RABObank Clubkas Campagne (Campaign to Raise Money for the Club) again yielded a contribution to our funds. Thanks to the many contributions from those who have a good heart for us, we were a financially healthy foundation again during the past year, which enabled us to carry out all the activities planned.

## 8. Looking ahead in 2023

For 2023 the following activities have already been planned:

- ✓ 365 Sunset Marches
- ✓ 22 February: annual participation of a German/Dutch delegation
- ✓ 11 April: Radboud University commemorating the closure of the university in 1943 and 100-year anniversary.
- ✓ 4 and 5 May. Receiving the Liberation Fire and informal remembrance day.
- ✓ 17 July. Participation in the 4Day Marches detachment of international veterans on the Monday evening preceding the marches.
- ✓ 20 September: Waal Crossing Remembrance
- ✓ 19 October: 9th Sunset March anniversary.
- ✓ 11 November: International Veterans Day



Board Sunset March:  
Standing, fltr: Peter Grotens, René Scheeres, Wim van Zijl, Tim Ruijling, George de Jongh, Henk Hanenburg, Kees Bleijerveld  
Kneeling, fltr: Wim van Mierlo, Dirk-Jan van Zuidam, Douwe Osinga