

# Dutch priest meets his American liberator from WWII

A touching story from The Spokesman-Review in Spokane, Washington.

*Lying in a hospital bed, his heart failing, Allan Wood met a priest.*



*The two were sharing a room at Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center when Wood discerned the priest's Dutch accent. They struck up a conversation, and soon these two men, ages 89 and 88, uncovered a shared experience from decades ago that molded their lives.*

*They had never met until their chance encounter in the hospital last Nov. 11 – Veterans Day. But they spoke intimately of Sept. 17, 1944, in Nijmegen, one of Holland's oldest cities.*

*Wood was among more than 40,000 U.S. Army soldiers who boarded a fleet of C-47 airplanes in England, flew several hundred miles on a crisp clear day, and parachuted into a daring military plan drawn up to liberate the Dutch, outflank the enemy and seize the industrial heartland of Nazi Germany.*

*The priest, Arnold Schoffemeer, was a seminary student at the time. He lived quietly, sometimes hiding to avoid being conscripted into the occupying German army or sent to labor camps.*

*The two elderly men shared their memories of those momentous days. Wood told of his jump and tough mission. Schoffemeer, who struggles to speak, recalled the joy of liberation and street celebrations. And he offered thanks.*

*"You saved my town. You saved my life," Schoffemeer told Wood as he held his hand tight.*

*The meeting has been cathartic for Wood, who received the Bronze Star for combat valor and a Purple Heart. He has struggled all his life with his memories and role in the war.*

*"I really wept. It was such a powerful statement from him, and to think I had a part in that was just unreal," he said.*

*"He lived in that city and he saw our chutes opening and us coming down."*

*Holland would be Wood's first jump, and he steeled himself for battle.*

*He had missed parachuting into Normandy three months earlier. Commanders had sent him to cadet training in Vermont instead.*

*He felt guilty about missing the invasion of France where his unit, like so many others, took heavy casualties.*

*With 80 pounds of guns, grenades, bullets and extra gear strapped to his body, he drifted into the Dutch countryside as a member of the 82nd Airborne Division's 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment.*

*Inside the city, the drone of hundreds of airplanes brought townspeople to their windows and into the streets. Among them was Schoffelmeer, who gazed into the sky as the paratroopers descended "like angels." They represented freedom to the Dutch, who had lived under Nazi occupation for five years.*

*"We were so happy," Schoffelmeer, a Spokane priest for decades, told close friends who are supervising his care in a North Side nursing home. "We wanted to be saved. To be free."*

**Much more here. Be sure to check out the video.**