

**In the Aftermath of United States Presence in Nijmegen: The Oversteek  
Bridge as a Paradox of World War Two Commemoration**



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## **Abstract**

*This study examines how the dedication of the Oversteek bridge to the crossing can be explained. The memorial bridge in Nijmegen focuses on the celebration of the heroic crossing in 1944. This creates an unhealthy balance between the representation of the United States as liberator and destroyer of the city. The bridge is therefore a paradox of World War Two commemoration. By analyzing memory and trauma theories and applying those to the bridge, it is concluded that Nijmegen suffers from a cultural trauma caused by the American bombing. The Oversteek bridge functions as coping strategy to resolve the trauma and create a collective identity. It overemphasizes the liberator side of the American intervention in Nijmegen during the war, compensating for the destroyer side. The United States needs to be recognized in public life as the country responsible for the bombing in order for the trauma to be resolved. A monument uniting the two sides could accomplish this.*

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## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Chapter 1: The Oversteek Bridge.....	8
1.1. Constructing the Oversteek Bridge	
1.2. Reception of the Bridge	
1.3. The Monument	
1.3.1. Commemorating the Waal Crossing	
1.3.2. Operation Market Garden and the Crossing	
Chapter 2: The Oversteek Bridge as a Paradox.....	20
2.1. The Bombing of Nijmegen	
2.2. The Bombing Then and Now	
2.3. Drawbacks of Operation Market Garden	
Chapter 3: Memorializing the Oversteek Bridge.....	29
3.1. Memory Theory	
3.2. Memory Boom	
3.3. <i>Memorial Mania</i>	
3.4. <i>Memorial Mania</i> and the Oversteek Bridge	
Chapter 4: Relevance of the Monument.....	40
4.1. Trauma Theory	
4.2. The Six Stages of Trauma	
4.3. Collective Trauma in Nijmegen	
4.3.1. The Crossing as Trauma	
4.3.2. The Bombing as Trauma	
4.4. Resolution	
4.5. The United States and Nijmegen After the War	
Conclusion.....	54
Recommendations for Further Research.....	56
Works Cited.....	58
Attachments	
1. Personal Interview with Anja Adriaans.....	63
2. Personal Interview with Dorine Steenberghe.....	68
3. Personal Interview with Tim Ruijling.....	74

## Introduction

Over one and a half year ago, I was invited to attend the unofficial opening of Nijmegen's newest city bridge, the Oversteek. The reason for this invitation was my participation in a group project on the Marshall Plan in Nijmegen for one of my Master's courses. At first glance, the Marshall Plan and the construction of the bridge seem unrelated. The two events share some similarities however. As it happens, the bridge is a memorial, remembering the crossing of the Waal river by the American Army during the war. This crossing took place in order for the American troops to be able to liberate Nijmegen from the Nazi Army that occupied the city. Therefore, both the Marshall Plan and the Oversteek bridge are related to the involvement of the United States in Nijmegen and consequences of the Second World War.

On November 22, 2013, the day of the pre-opening had arrived, and my fellow students and I joined the other attendees at the office building of the regional newspaper *De Gelderlander*, which provided us with a beautiful view on the bridge. Among the attendees were several United States citizens who had come to the city of Nijmegen with the sole purpose of witnessing the opening of the Oversteek bridge. The reason for these Americans to cross the Atlantic Ocean for this event is that they were all relatives of the 48 men who died during the crossing of the Waal river in 1944. They had travelled all the way to the city of Nijmegen to honor their deceased family members and more importantly, to keep their memory alive. Besides the American families, people in Nijmegen see the memorial bridge as an important aspect of their heritage as well. Not only did *De Gelderlander* dedicate a book to the bridge and the 48 fallen soldiers, but the mayor of Nijmegen also draws a connection between the past and present, and emphasizes the historical value of the bridge in his speech at the official opening of the bridge ("Nijmegen viert," par. 6).

The unmistakable interest in the commemoration of the past manifested itself even stronger at the reenactment of the Waal crossing on its seventieth anniversary. On 20 September 2014, part of the 82<sup>nd</sup> American Airborne Division crossed the Waal river in Nijmegen. They did so to honor their colleagues who had done the same on the same date in 1944. Yet again, American citizens had crossed the Atlantic Ocean to be a part of a commemorative ceremony. Similarly, the Dutch public was interested in the remembrance as well, because several thousands of people attended the reenactment. The police even discouraged any more people to come to the event, because of the overcrowded terrain

(“Politie: het is vol,” par. 1). For me, the question arose why there is such an interest in the commemoration of the Waal crossing. After all, the military action by the 82<sup>nd</sup> American Airborne Division occurred over seventy years ago. In other words, I wondered why the bridge had become a memorial. This question became even more pressing to me when I learned about the existence of a monument remembering the Waal crossing which was built in 1984. The Oversteek bridge was thus not a memorial for an event forgotten in history, but rather a reaffirmation of the facts.

The commemoration of the crossing, and the heroic portrayal of the 48 men who died because of it, raises even more questions when the bombing of the city of Nijmegen by the American Air Force is taken into account. This happened six months before the crossing of the Waal river, and destroyed large parts of the city center. On top of that, the nation that was celebrated so abundantly at the opening of the Oversteek bridge and the reenactment of the crossing, had caused the death of 766 Nijmegen civilians by the ‘accidental’<sup>1</sup> bombing (“Namenlijst,” par. 1). It can therefore be argued that the relationship between the United States and Nijmegen during the Second World War was a paradoxical one. On the one hand, the Americans tried to liberate the city from the German Nazi Army in September 1944, but on the other hand, they had bombed the city several months earlier in February. The Oversteek bridge only portrays the troops from the United States as heroes or martyrs though. The bridge can therefore be seen as a paradox of World War Two commemoration, because it leaves out the portrayal of the American troops as destroyers of the city of Nijmegen.

In order to deal with questions related to remembrance and commemoration, the field of study which needs to be addressed is that of memory studies. A leading scholar in this field is Erika Doss from the University of Notre Dame. Both she and other scholars have witnessed a growing interest in the subject, especially in World War Two memory (Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, eds. 3; Bal, Crewe, and Spitzer, eds. 191; Caruth 34; Doss, *Memorial Mania* 2; Gutman, Brown, and Sodaro, eds. 68; Kitzmann, Mithander, and Sundholm, eds. 105). The recent book on *Memorial Mania; Public Feeling in America* by Doss from 2010 offers theoretical tools which can be of value to this thesis, as they will help me to critically approach and explain the change in public memory. Doss argues in this book that the United States ‘suffers’ from “memorial mania,” which she describes as “an obsession with issues of memory and history and an urgent desire to express and claim those issues in visibly public

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<sup>1</sup> The status of the bombing as ‘accidental’ has become controversial in recent years. Scholars such as Joost Rosendaal suggest that the American planes knew they were dropping the bombs on the city earlier than what one thought (Rosendaal *Nijmegen '44* 63-74). I will use the term ‘accidental’ in this thesis however, to indicate that the United States did not intend to destroy Nijmegen and kill many of its citizens.

context” (2). The book contains a description and analysis of several affects such as anger, grief, and gratitude, that are visible in different types of memorials. In her book, Doss also mentions trauma as an important factor in memorialization (132).

A book which connects the subjects of memory and trauma is *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* by Jeffrey Alexander and others published in 2004. As the title suggests, this book focuses on cultural trauma, but similar to *Memorial Mania*, mentions memorialization as a result of trauma. According to Alexander and his co-authors, memorials can reduce the feeling of trauma (Alexander et al. 267). In a discussion of trauma theory, Cathy Caruth’s work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* cannot be excluded. This book is also very helpful to connect memorial mania to theories of trauma. Caruth’s theory deals with trauma in literature, and the “language of trauma” in particular, which is not relevant to the case study of the Oversteek bridge (4). The book is nevertheless useful, because Caruth elaborately discusses the meaning of the term trauma in a theoretical as well as narrative context. Among others, she argues that traumas can be transmitted on others that have not witnessed the event that led to the trauma itself (8). It is therefore possible for the citizens of present day Nijmegen to be traumatized by events of the Second World War, without having witnessed the war themselves.

It is important to understand the events of Nijmegen’s Second World War history in order to draw conclusions from memory and trauma theory applied to the Oversteek bridge. Therefore, Rosendaal’s books *Nijmegen ’44; Verwoesting, Verdriet en Verwerking* from 2009, and the recent English alteration *The Destruction of Nijmegen, 1944; American Bombs and German Fire* from 2014 are of great use. Rosendaal describes the bombing of Nijmegen by the Allied Forces and places it in the context of Operation Market Garden, of which the Waal crossing was a component. He analyzes the effects of these events on the city of Nijmegen into detail. On top of that, he interprets the fluctuating change in interest in commemoration practices throughout the years. A significant argument in his work is that the bombing was forgotten for many years, making it a possible source of trauma for the people of Nijmegen (*Nijmegen ’44* 228; *The Destruction of Nijmegen* 9). Even though he indicates the bombing is being re-remembered, he does not go into detail about what caused this change to happen.

The main question I want to address in this thesis is how memory studies can explain the dedication of the Oversteek bridge to the crossing, taking into account the paradoxical role of the United States as both liberator and destroyer of Nijmegen during the Second World War. Questions related to the main research question are: what is the relevance of a monument

today? Specifically, why did the city choose to erect a monument in 2013, almost seventy years after the actual event, when another monument for the crossing was already built in 1984? Also, I wonder why the focus is not on the bombing, as this event seems to have had a greater impact on city life compared to the crossing. I will consider the role of the media when answering these questions, because I believe the media can be an influential tool in shaping society. Finally, as American Studies is the main field of study for this thesis, I want to include a portrayal of the attitude of the United States towards the developments in commemoration practices in Nijmegen.

I think these questions are important to answer, because first of all, they deal with a contemporary and current topic. Memory study scholars are witnessing an increased interest in the remembrance of historical events, and this also seems to be the case for Nijmegen as can be seen from the Oversteek bridge and the fact that it has been turned into a memorial (Miller, and Tougaw 1; Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper 3). Secondly, this thesis will provide a theoretical framework for the case study of the Oversteek bridge in Nijmegen, which can possibly be applied to other case studies in the future as well. This theoretical framework will be innovative, because the Netherlands has not been subject of many research in memory studies. Third of all, the answers to the questions posed in the previous paragraph are relevant to the city of Nijmegen, because they can enlighten city officials on subjects such as memorialization and trauma, and can explain the blooming interest in memorials. It is imaginable that as a result, city officials can act on the findings of this research to meet the needs of the Nijmegen citizens. On a scholarly level, the case study of Nijmegen is especially interesting because of its conflicted relationship with the United States during the Second World War. The United States has shown to be both a destroyer and a liberator of Nijmegen. Although the Americans have mistakenly bombed other parts of the Netherlands, no other city was damaged as much and experienced more casualties than Nijmegen. This makes the city an interesting case study which is unlike others.

I expect that the intervention of the United States in Nijmegen during the Second World War is mainly portrayed positively as a result of the trauma caused by the bombing of the city center in February 1944. In other words, I think that a World War Two trauma has led to a positive memorialization of the American troops in Nijmegen, manifested in the Oversteek bridge. The bridge is thus turned into a memorial to compensate for the traumatic experience of the bombing by emphasizing the positive side of the American presence.



## **Chapter 1: The Oversteek Bridge**

In the discussion of an object it is important to know exactly what the object entails. In this case, the object is the Oversteek bridge in Nijmegen. Therefore, this chapter will start out with an array of general information about the bridge. The monumental value of the Oversteek bridge will be discussed after that, and the chapter will conclude with the provision of some context information which will help us reach a better understanding of the monument.

### **1.1. Constructing the Oversteek Bridge**

The main reason for the city of Nijmegen to build the Oversteek bridge was to improve accessibility to the region, and to distribute traffic over the city in order to reduce traffic congestion (“Stadsbrug,” par. 2). Before the Oversteek bridge was built, there was only a single bridge which could be used by road traffic to cross the Waal river: the Waal bridge, which was built in 1936 (par. 1). After 75 years, the increased traffic density in the region “asked for a second river crossing” according to city officials (par. 1). This is how the idea to build the Oversteek bridge came into being. The architects who were asked to take on the Oversteek bridge project were the Belgian business partners Laurent Ney and Chris Poulissen (“Nieuwe stadsbrug,” par. 1). Their intention was to construct a bridge which would be “an homage to the river landscape” (par. 1). According to architect Chris Poulissen, the duo aspired to “show respect for the landscape as well as for the history of the location and the city” (par. 16).

The history of the location which Poulissen mentions dates back to the Second World War. The Oversteek bridge is built almost on the exact site where the third battalion of the 82<sup>nd</sup> American Airborne Division crossed the Waal river in order to liberate Nijmegen from the Nazi regime on September 20, 1944. It is this military action, referred to as the ‘Waal oversteek’ (Waal crossing), where the new city bridge received its name from (Willems et al. 6). To honor the historic and monumental value of the bridge’s location, the architects Ney and Poulissen invited Atelier Veldwerk, a partnership between artists Onno Dirker and Rudy Luijters, to design a monument which would celebrate the crossing and could be integrated in the Oversteek bridge (Ney-Poulissen, and Atelier Veldwerk 47). The result of their cooperation is the art project ‘Lights Crossing’, part of which can be seen on image 1. The

monument comprises of 48 pairs of streetlights to symbolize the 48 men who were killed during the Waal crossing in 1944.



Image 1: Lights Crossing

*Photography: © Thea van den Heuvel /DAPH*

The bridge is almost 1.4 kilometer long, and has an arch with a span length of 285 meter, making it the largest single-arch bridge in Europe (“Verkeersbrug,” par. 1; “De boog,” par. 1). The construction of the bridge started in early April 2011, and thousands of people gathered for the official opening over two years later on November 23, 2013 (“De boog,” par. 4; “Nijmegen viert,” par. 1). The end result of the efforts of the construction team can be seen on image 2. Among the 15,000 people that were in the audience at the opening were several relatives from the American soldiers who were killed during the Waal crossing over seventy years ago (“10.000 Nijmegenaren,” pars. 2-4). They crossed the bridge as special guests in military vehicles to be part of the celebratory opening (par. 4). One of the relatives who was present was Barbara Gavin, daughter of lieutenant-general James Gavin, who led the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division at the time of the Waal crossing (par. 3). According to the mayor of Nijmegen, Hubert Bruls, the audience was the witness of a very special and historical event to celebrate a connection between the past and the present, because the bridge will lead to

improved accessibility of the city, and also refers to the crossing of 1944 (“Nijmegen viert,” pars. 5-6). Both the Waal crossing in 1944, and the Oversteek bridge built in 2013 had the same goal, which was to improve life in the city of Nijmegen.



Image 2: the Oversteek bridge

*Photography: © Thea van den Heuvel /DAPh*

In its short existence, the Oversteek bridge has already received recognition from the construction industry on several occasions. In 2014, the bridge won the Dutch ‘National Steel-prize’ (‘Nationale Staalprijs’) in the infrastructure category (“Prijs voor Nijmeegse stadsbrug,” par. 1). The Oversteek bridge received the award, because it “is more than a bridge,” according to the jury, who believe it to be “an icon, an art object, a memorial ... and a meeting place” combined into a single structure (pars. 1-2). The jury of the Dutch ‘National Construction-award’ (‘Nationale Bouwprijs’) agreed with those remarks in 2015, when they chose the Oversteek bridge as their winner in the category of civil artworks (“Nationale Bouwprijs 2015,” par. 1). They thought of the bridge as a “sight for sore eyes” which unites “high quality, respect for history, aesthetics, complexity... technique, and sustainability” (par. 3). All in all, both the general public, city officials, and the construction industry seem to be pleased with the building of the Oversteek bridge, which, on top of that, has reached its goal

to reduce traffic crossing the Waal bridge (“Verkeer stroomt,” par. 2; “Eenderde automobilisten,” par. 1).

## 1.2. Reception of the Bridge

The large number of newspaper articles used to write the previous paragraph show that the Oversteek bridge has received a substantial amount of media attention. The main contributor to the circulation of information about the bridge is the regional daily newspaper *De Gelderlander*. According to Dorine Steenbergen, editor at *De Gelderlander*, this is most likely due to the fact that the paper’s main office building is located on the riverbank right next to the building site of the bridge (Steenbergen. Personal interview). The location of the office building did not only result in a large number of newspaper articles, but also in a book about the background of the 48 fallen soldiers who are commemorated on the Oversteek bridge. This project, commissioned by *De Gelderlander*, was taken on by Steenbergen who did extensive research for a year. On top of that, she called in the help of local historians, Americanist Anja Adriaans from the Radboud University, and many colleagues at the newspaper to complete the book (Personal Interview). According to her, she and her colleagues “felt that we had to give the streetlights a face and write a portrait on each of the fallen soldiers” as soon as city officials told them about the installment of the monument Lights Crossing (Personal Interview).

Steenbergen’s assignment was to locate and interview living relatives of the 48 men who died during the crossing of the Waal river in September 1944. It was her goal to learn more about the background of the “boys” as Steenbergen repeatedly calls the fallen soldiers during a personal interview. She believes that “personal stories are much more telling than military stories” and that “it is easier for people to identify with [human interest stories], because you can think: ‘that could have been my brother.’” These human interest stories are the power of the book according to her, and can be a reason for the public to gain interest in the case. The Dutch version of the book called *De Oversteek: zoektocht naar 48 Amerikaanse oorlogshelden*, was published simultaneously with the opening of the Oversteek bridge in November 2013 and the third edition was printed only one month later (Steenbergen, “The Crossing,” par. 1). On top of that, one thousand copies of the English version, *The Crossing: In search of 48 American war heroes*, were printed in September 2014 (“De Oversteek vertaald,” pars. 1-2).

Overall, the Oversteek bridge, and its monumental value in particular, has received a warm welcome from the public. Dorine Steenbergen is positively surprised by the amount of attention the bridge has received as well. She applauds initiatives which are inspired by the function of the bridge as memorial, such as the ‘Sunset March.’ This march is an initiative by local veteran Tim Ruijling to let a veteran march along with the monument Lights Crossing each night at the moment the streetlights are turned on. With their initiative, Ruijling and his co-veterans want to stress the importance of remembering the location’s past, and hope to inspire other veterans as well as non-veterans to recognize the importance too (Ruijling. Personal Interview.)

Attention for the Oversteek bridge has surpassed that of the regional newspaper, and it spiked the interest of the national and even international public on the seventieth anniversary of the Waal crossing. The United States Ambassador to the Netherlands, Timothy Broas, was present at the Waal crossing commemoration ceremony on September 20, 2014, which was held during the anniversary of not only the crossing, but Operation Market Garden of which the crossing was part (“Ambassador Broas”). In his speech he honored the third Battalion of the United States 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division and spoke of the men who crossed the river as “courageous, battle-hardened paratroopers” who “left the safety of their homes and loved ones to cross an ocean and fight tyranny” (pars. 5-6). Broas proclaimed that “they were ordinary men who rose to meet seemingly impossible odds and did extraordinary things. Through their actions, the soldiers... helped secure the peace and freedom we have enjoyed for the past seventy years” (par. 7). He concluded his speech with a ‘thank you’ to the people of Nijmegen for keeping the memory of the Waal crossers alive (par. 8). As can be seen from the citations, Broas repeatedly emphasized the heroic actions of the American soldiers and stressed the courageous nature of the men.

The presence of Ambassador Broas was not the only interest in the bridge by the (inter)national public during the seventieth anniversary of Operation Market Garden. Local authorities in the region organized many activities with a commemorative nature, but the highlight in Nijmegen was a reenactment of the Waal crossing near the Oversteek bridge. The event was run by the Dutch army and the United States 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division. Seventy years after the original crossing in 1944, paratroopers of the same division paddled across the river in canvas boats once again in remembrance of the heroic military action and the soldiers who lost their lives because of it. The reenactment was broadcast on national television, and the spectacle attracted over four thousand visitors (“Zeer grote belangstelling,” par. 1). The news

of the event even travelled the Atlantic Ocean, and was covered in the New York Times on September 18, 2014 (Schuetze).

Despite the elaborate coverage of the reenactment on national television and the articles on the event in several newspapers, the national interest in the Oversteek bridge is remarkably slim according to Americanist Anja Adriaans (Personal interview). The focal point on September 20, 2014 was the commemoration of Operation Market Garden as a whole, which received much more media attention than the crossing in Nijmegen. Adriaans, who made important contributions to the realization of the book *De Oversteek* published by *De Gelderlander*, argues that the interest in the southeast of the Netherlands concerning the Second World War can be explained by the importance of the region during the war. She points out in a personal interview that the region, of which Nijmegen is part as well, is sometimes called “the Normandy of the Netherlands,” and was vital for the course of the war in the Netherlands. The importance of the region for the course of the Second World War is exactly the reason for Adriaans to have expected more attention directed towards the Oversteek bridge and its monumental value on a national level (Personal Interview). Both Adriaans and Steenbergen admit that most media attention for the Oversteek bridge is generated by *De Gelderlander*, who Adriaans calls a “stakeholder” because of the book they published on the project. These statements by Adriaans and Steenbergen can be affirmed by the limited number of articles that is published on the Oversteek bridge by newspapers other than *De Gelderlander*.

The monumental value of the Oversteek bridge has thus shown to attract the public’s interest in commemorating the Waal crossing of September 1944. Also, initiatives such as the Sunset March continue to inspire ‘ordinary’ people and veterans to keep the memory of the 48 fallen Airborne soldiers alive. On top of that, commemorative ceremonies are attended by a large public. This indicates that the public believes it to be important to remember the Second World War. The attention for the monumental value of the Oversteek bridge is mostly regional though, as national and international media covers the memorial only marginally.

### **1.3. The Monument**

As was mentioned before, the increase in accessibility to the city center and reduction of traffic density in the region are not the sole purposes of the 1.4 kilometer long Oversteek bridge. The bridge is also the location of a monument to remember 48 American soldiers who died crossing the river Waal to liberate Nijmegen from the Nazi regime in 1944. The



monumental value of the Oversteek bridge is an interesting case study, because various historical and sociological aspects are at play. The fact that the bridge is a memorial receives increasing attention from different directions, especially on a regional level. To gain a better understanding of the meaning behind the monument, we must go back to September 20, 1944.

### **1.3.1. Commemorating the Waal Crossing**

At three o'clock on September 20, 1944, 336 men of the 82nd United States Airborne Division crossed the river Waal using canvas boats in order to seize the north-end of the Waal bridge (Rosendaal, *Nijmegen '44* 129; Sliepenbeek 37-38). These men from the 504<sup>th</sup> regiment under command of colonel Reuben Tucker were followed by more than 560 fellow soldiers from the same regiment in the next two hours (Willems et al. 9). Lieutenant general James Gavin's 82<sup>nd</sup> Division was trying to capture the bridge for days, but had been unsuccessful so far. The Waal crossing, which is known today as simply 'the crossing' resulted in a win for the Allied Forces, because the American troops were finally able to defeat the Germans who defended the bridge, and took control of the vital piece of infrastructure (Sliepenbeek 40). Not all of the men who tried to cross the river would be joining in the celebration of the capture of the bridge, because 48 of them lost their lives in the attempt.

The journey over the Waal river executed by the soldiers of the 82<sup>nd</sup> United States Airborne Division is represented at the Oversteek bridge primarily in its name, location, and form. The architects of the bridge call it "the literal materialization of the movement which the Allied Forces made on that day in 1944" (Ney-Poulissen, and Atelier Veldwerk 41). The actions of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Division at the Waal crossing naturally coincide with the Oversteek bridge because the name and location of the latter are a reference to the event which occurred in the Second World War. To this extent, as the designers from Ney-Poulissen and Atelier Veldwerk point out in a booklet on the Oversteek project: "The bridge itself can be seen as a first-rate monument" (41). Along with the Oversteek bridge as an object, the commemorative plaques, and the art project Lights Crossing designed by Atelier Veldwerk have contributed to the monumental value of the bridge as well ("Herdenkingsplaquettes," par. 1). The memory of the soldiers who were killed in the military action on the Waal river is kept alive by 48 pairs of streetlights on the bridge, one pair for each soldier who did not make it to the other side of the river. Every night at sunset, the pairs are turned on one by one. The project "marks the bridge as ... the largest war memorial in the Netherlands" according to filmmaker Martijn Schinkel,

who dedicated a short film to the monument. The goal of the art project is to keep the memory of the Waal crossing alive, because it ensures that “the crossing is repeated every day” (Ney-Poulissen, and Atelier Veldwerk 45).

The significance of the site where the enormous bridge now resides was recognized many years before the building of the Oversteek bridge. The north-end of the riverbank has been the location of a small monument for the Waal crossing ever since 1984 (Rosendaal, *Nijmegen '44* 266). The monument was an initiative by two citizens from Lent, a small town on the north bank of the Waal river (Ney-Poulissen, and Atelier Veldwerk 38). Together with sculptor Marius van Beek, the volunteers conceptualized a monument made of two rocks engraved with information about the Waal crossing both in English and in Dutch, and a plaque with the names of the 48 casualties (39-40). The monument, which is shown on image 3, was inaugurated by general James Gavin, and was the site of small commemoration ceremonies after that (Rosendaal, *Nijmegen '44* 266-268; Ney-Poulissen, and Atelier Veldwerk 40). It lost its significance over the years as the public grew increasingly disinterested however (Rosendaal, *Nijmegen '44* 266-268; Ney-Poulissen, and Atelier Veldwerk 40).



Image 3: The ‘old’ Waal crossing monument

Photography: © Thea van den Heuvel /DAPh



The public's interest in remembering the crossing, and the Second World War in general, regained ground in the early 1990s with an increasing attention to personal stories from war veterans and their relatives (Rosendaal, *Nijmegen '44* 287). Commemoration ceremonies attracted an increasing number of people, and the Waal crossing monument became more important in the public's mind. When the monument had to be removed in 2011 because it was on the building site of the Oversteek bridge, it was clear that the engraved stones would have to return when the bridge was finished (Ney-Poulissen, and Atelier Veldwerk 40-41). It was then decided by the architects, artists, and city officials that the monument would return in a different setting, namely as part of the Oversteek bridge itself (42). The old monument now forms a connection with the new Oversteek bridge, because some of the stones which are used for the bridge derive from the same stone pit as the stones of the monument in 1984 (Dirker).

The connection between the old and the new monument is reinforced by the Sunset March which starts at the new monument Lights Crossing on the south-end of the bridge, and finishes at the site of the old Waal crossing monument on the north bank. It was the art work Lights Crossing that inspired Dutch veterans from the area to hold the march every night, because the streetlights are turned on pair by pair, "at the pace of a slow march," and will lead pedestrians to the other side of the bridge, 950 meters further, in approximately twelve minutes (Atelier Veldwerk; Ney-Poulissen, and Atelier Veldwerk 45). Therefore, it seems only natural to walk along with this "crossing of light" in memory of the fallen soldiers (Atelier Veldwerk). Local veteran and organizer of the Sunset March Tim Ruijling wants to remember the 48 men, because "during the crossing... the 82<sup>nd</sup> American Airborne Division fought for the freedom of our country. They gave their lives for that... They are the ones who have secured a life in peace and freedom for us" (Personal Interview). Ruijling came up with the idea of the Sunset March, because he thought it was necessary to make people aware of the special meaning behind the light monument. Before the existence of the Sunset March, he thought, "[car] drivers rushing by might think that half of the streetlights on the bridge is broken." The Sunset March was started to "turn the monument into something that is more alive," to enforce its goal of keeping the memory alive (Personal Interview). Although the initial idea was to let veterans carry out the march, because Ruijling was positive they would do it in a "dignified and respectful" manner, the general public also appeared to be interested in the march. The veterans are now joined by so-called 'followers' almost every night, who "just come to the bridge, walk along with us, [and] ask questions" (Personal Interview). Luckily, Tim Ruijling's great fervor is shared by a growing group of veterans, including an

occasional foreign one. The most valuable march to Ruijling was in April 2015, when he was joined by a group of American military men and women stationed in the south of Germany, who were on a Battlefield Tour. “When you are walking there with forty American soldiers in silence, that is quite something. They did not say a word, they only experienced” he reveals about the impressive experience in a personal interview. Although it was hard work to get the initiative off the ground, Ruijling and his colleagues are pleased with the results as they continue to see the march growing.

The dedication of the veterans to the Sunset March demonstrates that the actions of the American paratroopers in 1944 inspire people today to celebrate their heroic deeds. This seems only natural when the general opinion is that the crossing determined the course of the Second World War to a large extent (Bogaarts et al. 12; Ney-Poulissen, and Atelier Veldwerk 41). Melchior Bogaarts calls it “the legendary Waal crossing” in his 2001 book *Bevrijding en Wederopbouw* (‘Liberation and Reconstruction’), and historian Frank van Lunteren describes the crossing as a “heroic action” (12; Willems et al. 9). According to History Professor Joost Rosendaal, much of the attention and admiration for the soldiers who fought in Nijmegen during the Second World War can be ascribed to the publication of the novel *A Bridge Too Far* by Cornelius Ryan in 1974 (*Nijmegen ’44* 263). This book about Operation Market Garden, a small element of which was the crossing, describes the American troops in a heroic manner that speaks to the imagination of the reader. In 1969, five years before the publication of *A Bridge Too Far*, the crossing is already recognized as a “miracle” however, and even during the war the Germans saw that “the situation became unsustainable” because of the “successful crossing by the American paratroopers” (Sliepenbeek 38; Willems et al. 17).

Ultimately, the importance of the Waal crossing, and the heroism of the paratroopers involved in the operation, has been acknowledged throughout the years. Most recently, chief-editor of the regional newspaper *De Gelderlander*, Ad van Heiningen, emphasized the importance of the annual commemoration ceremonies to honor the 82<sup>nd</sup> American Airborne Division as those men are “our liberators,” “heroes of the highest order” (Willems et al. 3). The question no one has seemed to ask so far, however, is why the Nijmegen public increasingly feels the need to remember the event while it occurred in a distant past.

### **1.3.2. Operation Market Garden and the Crossing**

To be able to address the question of why the public highly values the commemoration of events such as the crossing which happened many years ago, it is important to learn about the

context in which the Waal crossing took place. As mentioned before, it was a component of a larger military operation called Operation Market Garden. The goal of the Operation by the Allied Forces was to take control of the bridges that cross the Dutch main rivers Maas, Rijn, and Waal, the last of which runs through the Nijmegen region. If the Allied troops were able to succeed, they would make great progress in the war against Nazi Germany according to the director of the Dutch National Liberation Museum, Wiel Lenders (Bogaarts et al. 12).

Operation Market Garden was devised in September 1944 by the Allied Forces and included American, British, and Polish troops (Rosendaal *Nijmegen '44* 110-111). After the Normandy landings in June of that year, the Allied Forces quickly went on a liberating spree towards the Netherlands. Unfortunately, they came to endure many setbacks in Belgium, and had difficulty overpowering the German Army near the Belgian-Dutch border (Bogaarts et al. 12). Operation Market Garden was supposed to break the enemy line so the Allied troops would be able to continue their liberating spree towards Berlin. The Operation consisted of two steps: the 'Market' part, which was an airborne landing, and the 'Garden' part that followed, which was a ground offensive (Rosendaal *Nijmegen '44* 110). The American paratroopers of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Division that would later engage in the Waal crossing was responsible for an element of the airborne landing. They were dropped in a region close to Nijmegen and their assignment was to capture both the railway and road bridges connecting Nijmegen and Lent, and several smaller bridges crossing the Waal river in the area as well (110). The paratroopers were instructed to keep the bridges occupied until the British ground troops would arrive to fulfill the 'Garden' part of the operation (Sliepenbeek 12). According to Wiel Lenders, the 82<sup>nd</sup> was part of the largest airborne landing in history, with 7.5 thousand paratroopers from both British and American Divisions descending in the southeast of the Netherlands (Bogaarts et al. 9; Sliepenbeek 13).

The Operation commenced in the morning of September 17, 1944. General James Gavin left his station in England with his Division at eleven o'clock, and safely arrived in the region around Nijmegen at about three o'clock in the afternoon (Sliepenbeek 12; Rosendaal, *The Destruction of Nijmegen* 103). The first hours on land were prosperous for the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, because the men were able to capture several small bridges relatively easily (Rosendaal *Nijmegen '44* 116). They encountered more resistance, however, in their attempts to capture the Waal bridge which connects the cities of Nijmegen and Lent. After numerous failed attempts to defeat the small Nazi army which was present in the city, it was decided that the 504<sup>th</sup> regiment under command of colonel Reuben Tucker would have to cross the Waal river to reach the northern riverbank (129). This way, the Allied troops would be able to

attack the Waal bridge from both the north and the south, giving them a larger chance of success. The plan of the now famous Waal crossing was executed on September 20 at three o'clock and lasted for more than two hours, because there were only twenty-six boats available to ferry across over 900 men (Rosendaal *Nijmegen '44* 129-130; Willems et al. 9). In the evening of September 20<sup>th</sup>, three days after the paratroopers had landed in the outskirts of Nijmegen, the American troops finally succeeded in the capture of the Waal bridge as a result of the audacious crossing (Sliepenbeek 40). The 20<sup>th</sup> of September, 1944 is often perceived as the day Nijmegen was liberated from the Nazi army, but this day did not actually signify the end of the Second World War for the city (Rosendaal, *The Destruction of Nijmegen* 102).

Even though Operation Market Garden does not explain the relevance of a monument for the Waal crossing today, the Operation does illustrate the major influence of the crossing on the outcome of the Battle of Nijmegen. When it is taken into consideration that the event was a major contribution to the liberation of the city, a monument to remember the Waal crossing seems legitimate. The American intervention in Nijmegen during the Second World War was not always as positive and heroic though. As will be explained in the next chapter, the people of Nijmegen were put through some difficult situations by the Americans in the course of the war.

## **Chapter 2: The Oversteek Bridge as a Paradox**

The termination of Operation Market Garden did not signify the end of the war for the people of Nijmegen. As the Operation failed, Nijmegen became a front-line city for the war in the Netherlands where the Allied Forces regularly fought the German Nazi Army. The city thus became a warzone instead of liberated territory. Regardless of this and other disappointments which were the result of Operation Market Garden, there is another reason for the monumental value of the Oversteek bridge to be a paradox of World War Two commemoration. Besides the crossing, the United States Army played a significant role in another influential event in Nijmegen during the Second World War. This disastrous event is the bombing of the city in February 1944. The Allied troops who fought in Nijmegen in order to liberate the city in September are heroes without a doubt, but their colleagues from the American Air Force had bombed the city several months earlier, killing many innocent civilians and destroying a large part of the city center in the process. This devastating event shows the United States troops from a completely different angle, and questions their role as heroic saviors. The American soldiers were not only the liberators, but also the destroyers of Nijmegen.

### **2.1. The Bombing of Nijmegen**

On February 22, 1944 around noon, the city of Nijmegen was attacked out of the blue by dozens of bombs falling from the sky. The air-raid alarm had given the all-clear sign only minutes before. This sudden air-raid resulted in the destruction of a large part of the city center. The extension of the damage can be seen on image 4. Feelings of shock and confusion circulated the city because of the unexpected nature of the attack. The people of Nijmegen failed to understand the reason for the bombing, and at first, were not even sure about the identity of the attackers. The shock and confusion was not swept away after it became clear that the Allied Forces, the United States Air Force to be precise, were the ones to have dropped the bombs that early afternoon. Even though the Americans claimed that the bombing had been a mistake, incomprehension remained the main emotion about the bombing for many years. This is manifested in a booklet about the bombing which was published twenty-five years after the fact: “For reasons that are still unclear today, the Allied Forces bombed the center of the city” (Sliepenbeek 7). It was evident to the public however, that over

750 people died because of the bombing, thousands of people were injured, and the destruction of the city center meant that Nijmegen would never be the same again (Rosendaal, *The Destruction of Nijmegen* 25, 73; “Namenlijst,” par. 1). It would have been hard to believe for many citizens that the same American troops would come to liberate their city only seven months later.

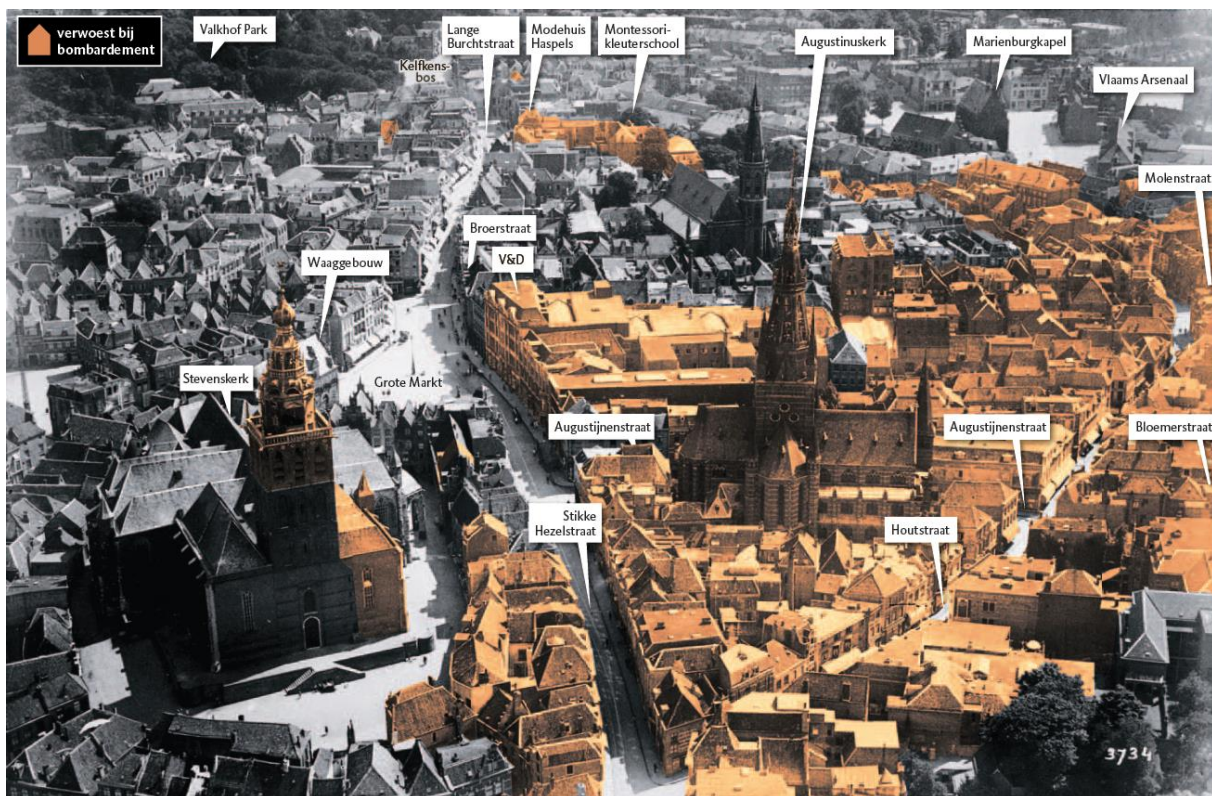


Image 4: the section of the Nijmegen city center in orange was destroyed in the bombardment of February '44 (Image: *De Gelderlander*)

The plan which would eventually lead to the mistaken bombing of Nijmegen was conceptualized as early as November 1943 (Rosendaal, *The Destruction of Nijmegen* 42). The British and American troops combined their efforts to target the German aviation industry in what they called ‘Operation Argument’ (42). The Allied Forces believed that they needed to extensively debilitate the German Air Force if they were ever to overthrow the Nazi Army (Bogaarts et al. 10). The plan could not be executed until February 1944 as a result of bad weather conditions and disagreements between the British and American Air Forces (Rosendaal, *The Destruction of Nijmegen* 42). When Operation Argument was finally given the green light, the goal was to destroy the majority of the German airplane industry within

one week, which became known as ‘Big Week’: the American Air Force would attack by day, and the British by night (Bogaarts et al. 10; Rosendaal, *The Destruction of Nijmegen* 42).

The attack of February 22 was canceled only minutes after it had commenced, because strong winds made the execution of the operation too dangerous (Rosendaal, *The Destruction of Nijmegen* 44). The pilots, many of whom were inexperienced according to Rosendaal, had been given the instructions to hit ‘targets of opportunity’ such as railways and factories if the preliminary targets were not reached (*The Destruction of Nijmegen* 41, 46; Bogaarts et al. 10). Some of the aircrafts hit industrial areas in Germany, others, mistaking Dutch border-cities for German ground, bombed industry in Enschede or Arnhem (Rosendaal, *The Destruction of Nijmegen* 49). A number of pilots made the fatal mistake of dropping their bombs on the city center of Nijmegen (49, 54). Some of the American soldiers claim not to have known that they had bombed Dutch cities until they checked the navigating equipment on the flight home, but others suggest that they had known all along (50). Some pilots state that “there was uncertainty about what could or could not be bombed” and blame the poor instructions for the accidental bombing (57). No matter what went wrong or who is to blame, many people in Nijmegen had lost their faith in the abilities of the Allied Forces, and in the Americans in particular.

In addition to the role of liberator, the United States has thus also played the role of Nijmegen’s destroyer in the Second World War. Within seven months, the way in which the people of Nijmegen perceived the American troops transformed drastically several times. The view of the Americans as protectors altered immediately after the bombing, but they were not seen as culprits for too long (Rosendaal, *The Destruction of Nijmegen* 71). Many citizen organizations put the blame on the Nazi Army, with reasons varying from giving out the all-clear sign on purpose to disrupting the navigation equipment of the American planes (62, 97). The involvement of the United States in the bombing was shoved under the rug, because the public could not afford to lose faith in the Allied Forces, who were the only ones who could stop the Second World War (Rosendaal, *Nijmegen ’44* 169-201). Understandably, the idea of the American troops as liberators was fully reinstated after the liberation of the city in September 1944, and the public was especially keen to convince others that the Americans had not executed any imputable acts to disadvantage the people of Nijmegen (169). Even though interest in the bombing of Nijmegen has increased in the last decade and more attention is directed towards it, the full story about the role of the United States in the devastating catastrophe remains untold for the most part (142). Fortunately, Joost Rosendaal’s

books on the Second World War in Nijmegen have contributed to the public recognition of the American involvement in the bombing.

## **2.2. The Bombing Then and Now**

The bombing of Nijmegen in February 1944 was a great embarrassment for the Allied Forces, especially for the United States. Many innocent people had been killed, and the American Air Force had destroyed a European city that she was supposed to safe. Inevitably, the United States was not proud of this fact, and therefore tried to avert attention from the mistake. The American government did not communicate with the Dutch government in exile about the bombing of the Dutch cities, so the Dutch government had to get wind of the facts via a Dutch navy commander (Rosendaal, *The Destruction of Nijmegen* 60). According to many parties, “it would have been better if the Americans had got in touch themselves” (60). Two months after the bombing, the American government reacted to the event by “expressing their sympathy to the people of Nijmegen” using leaflets which they dispersed around the city (66). The leaflets were not intended as an apology, so the United States government continued to ignore their role in the bombing. Eight months after the attack on Nijmegen, Operation Argument was called a success in a long article on the operation in *Life Magazine* (Rosendaal, *Nijmegen '44* 170-171). The fact that Big Week had resulted in the destruction of an innocent city, and had led to the death of hundreds of citizens remained unmentioned.

Surprisingly, the city of Nijmegen herself did little to remember the bombing either. The years after the war were marked by many commemoration practices, but no official ceremony was held for the bombing (Rosendaal, *Nijmegen '44* 197-198). Whenever the attack was mentioned in the media, the accountability of the United States was left out (201). Ten years after the bombing, a regional newspaper mentioned that the public had been afraid to be confronted with the trauma of February 1944, but according to Rosendaal “the forgotten disaster” caused many people to feel as if they were “left to suffer in silence” (228; Rosendaal, *The Destruction of Nijmegen* 9). In that anniversary year of 1954, city officials decided the time had finally come to remember the events of February 22 in an annual public commemoration ceremony (Rosendaal, *Nijmegen '44* 228). The role of the Americans remained unspoken of however, and the attendance at the ceremonies dropped drastically each year (230). This can be tied in with the more general decreasing interest in the Second World War in the 1960s and 1970s (245, 249). According to Rosendaal “it was not until 1982 that



interest in the events of 22 February 1944 began to revive,” with a particular enthusiasm towards personal stories of the victims (*The Destruction of Nijmegen* 141; *Nijmegen '44* 284).

The increasing interest in the bombing resulted in the construction of an official monument in 2000, 56 years after the fact (“Kunst op straat”). This monument, named after its appearance of a swing (‘De Schommel’), is located in the city center close to the entrance of the city hall and is pictured on image 5. The monument commemorates the civilian victims of February 22, 1944. In particular, it honors the death of 24 young children who attended a primary school located on the site of the monument, and eight of their teachers (“Kunst op Straat,” par. 1). According to Rosendaal “the story of the tragedy has not been told for years. Now [that the Schommel is built] it is, and it cannot be silenced” (*Nijmegen '44* 296). The iron swing is surrounded by a fence, which is supposed to make the onlooker “aware that the bombardment made an end to the carefree playfulness of the children” (“Kunst op straat,” par. 1). To express the severity of the event, artist Henk Visch has made the swing in such a manner that it can only slightly move (par. 1). The architects of the Oversteek bridge and the artists from Atelier Veldwerk feel that the monument is “a death blow, an appalling image, motionless, and painfully beautiful” (Ney-Poulissen, and Atelier Veldwerk 25).



Image 5: De Schommel (Photography: Hannah Prins)

Ever since the Schommel was revealed in 2000, an annual commemoration ceremony has been taking place at the location of the monument on February 22, and the public has valued the ceremony a great deal (Rosendaal, *Nijmegen '44* 298). On February 22, 2015 as well, the ceremony was attended by a large public (“Drukke bij herdenking”). A representative of the United States Embassy at The Hague has been present at the commemoration ever since 2006, and this year the Ambassador to the Netherlands Timothy Broas delivered a speech in the name of the United States government (Rosendaal, *Nijmegen '44* 298; “Drukke bij herdenking,” par. 1). He started his speech by referring to his “last visit to Nijmegen... to commemorate the U.S. 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division’s courageous crossing of the Waal river seventy years ago” (Broas, par. 2). He devoted an entire paragraph to the crossing before he even mentioned the bombardment. Finally acknowledging the actual commemorative topic of the occasion, he then recognized the bombing as “a terrible tragedy” for the city and people of Nijmegen, and offered his “country’s deepest and most profound sympathies” (par. 3). Given that he was present as a United States official, it is remarkable that he did not pay any attention to the poignant fact that the Americans were accountable for the situation. According to *De Gelderlander*, this year’s speech was not an exception. The American representatives to the annual commemoration are known to talk about “sorrow” and “sadness” instead of “sorry” and “apologies” (Rosendaal, *Nijmegen '44* 298). Over seventy years after the city of Nijmegen was bombed by the American Air Force, the United States still finds it hard to acknowledge that fact that they were accountable for it. The probability of an official apology by the United States seems slim.

The United States is one step ahead of the Dutch government however, because at least Timothy Broas acknowledges the attack. The Dutch national government does not show any interest in the bombing of Nijmegen at all, which is another point of critique on the annual commemoration. The disinterest by ‘The Hague’ is reinforced by the fact that there is no representative present at the commemoration (“Herdenking bombardement leeft niet,” par. 2). Edo Fennema, who started the initiative to commemorate the event, believes it to be unfair that the bombing of Rotterdam is remembered extensively, while the attack on Nijmegen is completely forgotten on the national level (par. 1). According to Rosendaal this difference can be explained by the fact that the bombing of Nijmegen, unlike that of Rotterdam, “was a mistake, and one that was made by our friends” (*The Destruction of Nijmegen* 10). It is therefore more difficult to come to terms with for national as well as international parties. Besides the organizer of the commemoration, regional newspaper *De Gelderlander* also claims that it hurts the people of Nijmegen to not have a Dutch national government official

present at the commemoration of the February bombardment (“Herdenking bombardement leeft niet,” par. 1).

Despite the disinterested national government, the city and public of Nijmegen are undaunted when it comes to keeping alive the memory of the bombing. Many initiatives both from the city council and from ‘ordinary’ civilians to remember the attack prove to be successful. For one, a charitable institution called the ‘Gilde Nijmegen’ interested in sharing knowledge about the region organizes a guided city tour twice a month to show sites which were destroyed by the bombardment. The tour was only supposed to run for several months, but appeared very successful, and almost one and a half year later the last tour has yet to be announced (“Wandeling bombardement,” par. 1). The tour attracted 1200 people in its first year alone (“Ruim 60 sponsors,” par. 4). An exposition on several personal stories of the victims was launched at the ‘Huis van de Nijmeegse Geschiedenis’ (‘House of Nijmegen’s History’) simultaneously with the guided city tour. It has become the most successful exposition of the House, and was prolonged for several months (“Wandeling bombardement,” par. 2; “Expositie,” par. 2). Although the exposition has ended now, its success clarifies the fact that the public is curious about the bombing of Nijmegen. This was a reason for graphic designer and citizen of Nijmegen Bregje Jansen to push for a new commemorative project: 800 small metal plates on the streets of the city, one for each victim, to indicate the area which was affected by the bombardment (“800 metalen plaatjes,” par. 1). Jansen has received some financial aid from the city council, but also needs a substantial number of sponsors to realize the project. Yet again, the Nijmegen public shows to be interested in the remembrance of the bombing, because Jansen was able to find over sixty sponsors after only three weeks according to *De Gelderlander* (“Ruim 60 sponsors,” par. 1).

All in all though, the memory of the bombing of Nijmegen by the American Air Force on February 22, 1944 has been either suppressed or forgotten from the beginning. Both the American and the Dutch national government show little interest in the recognition of the matter, and the accountability of the United States has been especially ignored. Commemoration practices to keep the memory of the bombardment alive have come and gone throughout the years, but attract the interest of a large public today. Nevertheless, the role of the United States is still not discussed at large. It is interesting to see that an event which has had such a large impact on the city has to struggle so hard to be remembered, especially when it is taken into consideration that the actions of the American paratroopers at the crossing are celebrated so abundantly.

### 2.3. Drawbacks of Operation Market Garden

The abundant celebration of the Waal crossing does not do justice to the hundreds of civilian victims who fell during and after Operation Market Garden. The fights on the streets of Nijmegen between the Nazi Army and the Allied Forces cost many citizens their life, and hundreds of buildings were burnt down or destroyed on top of that (Rosendaal, *Nijmegen '44* 132). The Waal crossing monument does not correspond to the unsuccessful outcome of Operation Market Garden either. Although the crossing resulted in the victorious seizure of the Waal bridge for the Allied Forces, the end goals of the Operation were not met. The British troops were unable to stand ground at Arnhem, which retained the Allied Forces from crossing the Rijn river and advancing to Berlin (Bogaarts et al. 12; Rosendaal, *Nijmegen '44* 134). As was explained before, this meant for the people of Nijmegen that the war was not over yet for them, despite the liberation from the Nazi Army: their city became the front-line of a large battle which lasted for many months (Rosendaal, *The Destruction of Nijmegen* 123). In other words, Nijmegen became a war zone. The city had never been in such a dangerous situation, even though she had been in the hands of the Nazi Army before the Allied troops arrived.

The months following Operation Market Garden, the quality of life in Nijmegen deteriorated for its citizens, because there was a constant threat of fighting troops, bombings, and fires (Rosendaal, *Nijmegen '44* 134). Although neither the Allied nor the German Army intended to harm the people of Nijmegen, civilians were often accidentally killed by both parties, as the city became “one great military base” according to Joost Rosendaal (138). Many citizens had to leave the city center because their home had either been destroyed or was located in the battle zone (138). As a result, people had to live cramped up in air-raid shelters for months, and a serious housing problem arose (138). This was not the life which the citizens of Nijmegen had pictured for themselves after they had been ‘liberated’ in September. The critical situation in which the people of Nijmegen lived for several months puts Operation Market Garden and the crossing in a different perspective, as it might not have been the actual liberation of the city. According to the city council, the months that Nijmegen served as a front-line has cost the city more civilian lives than the entire war before the liberation in September 1944 did (“1944: De Bevrijding,” par. 2). When the Allied Forces had finally been able to take actual control over the region in March 1945, 17500 houses in Nijmegen were destroyed or damaged, and well over 800 people had been killed (Rosendaal, *Nijmegen '44* 141-143).

On top of the dangerous situations the people of Nijmegen were exposed to during the front-line period, the Allied Forces enhanced the misery by looting on a large scale (Willems et al. 175). During the Second World War, looting by the Allied troops was accepted by locals up to a point, because they were grateful for their service (Willems et al. 178). The scale on which the soldiers looted in the region around Nijmegen was so large though that the citizens grew slightly bitter with their liberators (Willems et al. 178). A paratrooper from the 82<sup>nd</sup> American Airborne Division has committed a bank robbery at least once for instance, and rumors of other incidents involving cracked safe-deposits are known as well according to historian Niels de Laat (Willems et al. 179). All of this caused friction in the relationship between the Nijmegen citizens and the American soldiers, which was already ambivalent because of the bombardment of February 22.

In sum, the living situation in the city of Nijmegen after Operation Market Garden was challenging. The citizens were confronted with the war on a daily basis as fights between the Allied and Nazi Forces surrounded them. These fights generated civilian deaths, fires, and destroyed property, forcing many citizens to live in air-raid shelters for months. On top of that, plundering soldiers seized the townspeople from whatever they had left. Consequently, the liberation from the Nazi Army was put in a different perspective. The ambivalent relationship between Nijmegen and the United States in the Second World War, which is nourished by this role of the Americans as both destroyers and liberators, makes the Oversteek bridge a paradox of World War Two commemoration. Both the bridge and commemoration practices throughout the city neglect the fact that the Americans were accountable for the bombing of Nijmegen. This is in conflict with reality, because the bombing has had as much, if not more, influence on the city as the crossing of the Waal river. In search of an explanation for the existing paradox I will explore theories in trauma and memory studies in the next chapters.

## Chapter 3: Memorializing the Oversteek Bridge

The fact that the Oversteek bridge has become a monument to commemorate the soldiers of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division who gave their lives at the crossing on September 20, 1944 is peculiar for several reasons. These reasons were explained in the previous chapter. All in all, present day interests in the bombing and the crossing seem out of balance, because the crossing is given much more attention, while the bombing had a larger influence on the city. This raises questions about the origin of the Oversteek bridge as a monument: what is the reason for its dedication to the crossing of the Waal river by American soldiers over seventy years ago? Memory studies offers tools to help us understand the case study, because it specializes in cases related to remembering. This is exactly what the Oversteek bridge is meant to stimulate among the people who cross it today.

### 3.1. Memory Theory

The word ‘memory’ originates from the Latin word ‘memor,’ which means ‘mindful’ (Doss, *Memorial Mania* 48). The term ‘mindful’ is described as being “aware of something that may be important” by the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. The same dictionary gives as much as ten descriptions for the term ‘memory.’ To sum up all of the definitions would be overabundant, so I will limit the definitions to those which are relevant to memory studies. The first definition which the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary gives is “the power or process of remembering what has been learned.” Another definition which is especially suitable in the case study of the Oversteek bridge, and also in the discussion of memory theory is the description of the term ‘memory’ as “commemorative remembrance.” The memorial bridge, as the name suggests, is dedicated to remember the fallen soldiers of the crossing. Thinking of the word ‘important’ in the description of the term ‘mindful,’ the crossing of the Waal river must have been important if the military action in 1944 is worth remembering over seventy years after the fact. The importance of the crossing has been discussed in the previous chapters, but its remembrance is still not self-evident when the bombing of the city by the same actor is taken into consideration. Therefore, research in the field of memory studies can be useful to reach a better understanding of the matter.

According to expert in the field Erika Doss, memory studies is an interdisciplinary subject which incorporates topics related to “public performativity,” “acts of remembering,” and the

influence of memory on the “formation and reformation of social identity” (*Memorial Mania* 48). Scholars engaging in memory studies must “consider the interplay of past and future” conforming to the authors of *Memory and the Future*, in order to “develop a full understanding of how individuals and societies remember” (Gutman, Brown, and Sodaro, eds. 1). They state that the present and future are influenced by the manner in which the past is “remembered, interpreted and dealt with” (1). Involving the Oversteek bridge in this theory, the way in which the bridge is used as a memorial for the crossing of the Waal river in the Second World War should reveal information about the past of the city.

Besides history, memory is also closely related to culture. Many scholars recognize that memory is “produced [by] individuals sharing a culture” in order for them to be able to “address another, to impress upon a listener, [and] to appeal to a community” (Bal, Crewe, and Spitzer, eds. 37; Felman, and Laub 204). This means that memory gives people a sense of belonging, or of being part of something more substantial than the individual. In other words, a collective identity is constructed through memory, which in turn allows people the opportunity of “interrelatedness,” which is the essence of “culture” as Professor Ernst van Alphen at Leiden University explains (Bal, Crewe, and Spitzer, eds. 37).

### **3.2. Memory Boom**

According to Erika Doss, people have been creating memorials to commemorate their deceased for “thousands of years” (*Memorial Mania* 63). For the past thirty years however, many scholars interested in memory studies have witnessed an increasing public interest in memory and memorials (Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, eds. 3; Bal, Crewe, and Spitzer, eds. 191; Caruth 34; Doss, *Memorial Mania* 2; Gutman, Brown, and Sodaro, eds. 68; Kitzmann, Mithander, and Sundholm, eds. 105). The events of 9/11 have given birth to an even greater appreciation of public memorials (Doss, *Memorial Mania* 188). Prove for the growing significance of memory in public culture is the rising number of monuments, especially in the United States, but also on a global level (Doss, *Memorial Mania* 2, 63). On top of that, more “anniversary commemorations to mark the beginning and ending of wars, and their key episodes” are organized every year, which is a sign for an increasing interest in both memory and history as well (Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, eds. 4).

The “new paradigm of memorialization” as the authors of *Memory and the Future* call the renewed interest in memory, is particularly focused on the future (Gutman, Brown, and Sodaro, eds. 67-68). It has become important for communities to understand the past so they

are able to learn from the mistakes of their ancestors in order to “create a better present and future” for themselves and others (67; Alexander et al. 63). This new paradigm of memorialization receives massive support from government agencies, because its emphasis on education can provide a more stable democratic environment (Gutman, Brown, and Sodaro, eds. 69). A result of the paradigm is that governments are forced to acknowledge “the negative, terrible and traumatic aspects of their pasts” to support the growing interest, and they often do so by building memorials and by organizing commemoration ceremonies (69). The revived interest in public memory is widely observed and supported by much evidence. It is therefore not striking that Professor in Comparative Literature at Columbia University Andreas Huyssen speaks of a “memory boom” (Bal, Crewe, and Spitzer, eds. 191).

The authors of *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration* established in the year 2000 that the memory boom concerns the commemoration of the Second World War in particular (Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, eds. 4). This is the case in Nijmegen as well, because local historians are noticing “a clear growth in [war associated] museum visits and international tourist to the region” (Schuetze). A reason which is often mentioned to explain the growing interest in World War Two memory is the dying out of the generation who experienced the war (Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, eds. 3; Crownshaw vi; Schuetze, par. 21). According to Ashplant and his co-editors, this “has added an urgency and poignancy to the endeavor of ... reflecting on its significance” (3). Certainly, “those who experienced the war are no longer around to answer questions” (Schuetze, par. 21). With this vanishing generation, the younger generation’s awareness grows that the last memories of the Second World War are vanishing with them. The “living memories” as expert in war memory Richard Crownshaw calls them, need to be replaced by something that will last, and continues to teach newer generations about the war (vi). Indeed, Friedrich St. Florian, designer of the World War Two memorial in Washington, DC, believes that “the essence of the memorial is for future generations,” and in this “transition period between memory and history,” memorials are needed to preserve the memories (qtd. in Doss 206; Schuetze, par. 22). This way, as was explained before, societies can be educated in order to “prevent... violence and atrocity in the future” (Gutman, Brown, and Sodaro, eds. 69).

Another reason for the interest in Second World War memory to bloom in the present day is the fact that victims and veterans have finally gathered enough courage to ask for public recognition for either the harm which was done to them, or the brave actions they performed (Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, eds. 3). These “demands for representation and respect,” as Doss calls them, are delayed so much because of the horrific nature of the experiences in the



Second World War (*Memorial Mania* 2, 40). The people who ask for representation did not do so before, because they were not prepared to face their traumatic experiences in public life yet. They had to work through their personal trauma first. As will be explained in the next chapter, the erection of memorials is a symptom of a later stage in the trauma process (Alexander et al. 169). The fact that it takes time to reach the stage in which public recognition is desired might also explain the rapid decline in visitors to the commemoration ceremonies which were held at the initial crossing monument from 1984 onwards. Besides the victims, the art community was apprehensive about the placement of World War Two memorials for a long period of time as well, because it was questioned whether “any kind of representational art could adequately express the horrors of the war” (Doss, *Memorial Mania* 40). Hence, artists needed time to decide on an appropriate form of representation. These analyses all explain the fact that the Second World War memory boom has taken so long to arrive in the public sphere.

A factor which intensifies the interest in Second World War memory now that it has arrived is the media. According to the authors of *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*, “... war commemoration is transformed into a media event” (Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, eds. 4). They argue that the media responds to the “increasing number” of commemoration ceremonies by “seiz[ing] upon forthcoming commemorative dates to stimulate cultural productions of all kinds” (4). In this way, the media “fuel[s] and amplifie[s]” the memory boom (4). Sociologist Jeffrey Alexander and expert in memory theory Erika Doss both claim that films and books especially contribute to the World War Two memory boom by personalizing historical events (Alexander et al. 231-232; Doss, *Memorial Mania* 150-151). Doss reckons that by “naming” characters, the actors from the Second World War become “real people” (*Memorial Mania* 150-151). In other words, names are “literal evidence of humanity,” and the public will be able to empathize with the characters because of that (151). The book *De Oversteek; Zoektocht naar 48 Amerikaanse Oorlogshelden* exemplifies that giving names to formerly unknown people attracts people’s attention. Also, both the publication of the book *A Bridge Too Far* and the launch of the film version have increased interest in World War Two memory in the past (Rosendaal, *Nijmegen ’44* 263). Besides being a tool to advertise certain stories, personalization is also an indicator of cultural trauma (Alexander et al. 231). It is used to relieve traumatic symptoms in a society struck by a collective trauma (231). Jeffrey Alexander states that the media can in fact be an actor in the creation of collective trauma (231). As for the Holocaust trauma for instance, “books, movies, plays, and television shows... played critically important roles” in its

construction (231). Doss and Eyerman believe that the media accentuates trauma as well, because “reporters obsessively sniff out and sensationalize” these stories (Alexander et al. 62; Doss, *Memorial Mania* 131, 326).

Many of the stories which the media overemphasizes are stories of fear and hate according to Sociologist David Altheide (1). He alludes to stories of terrorism in particular (182). Mass media increasingly started to promote fear by reporting on terrorism after 9/11 according to him (1). That was the result of the public’s “near-hysterical calls to ‘protect us’ and keep our borders safe” (1). This fear has also led to the massive support of “government measures aimed at [the public’s] security” in the United States (Doss, *Memorial Mania* 148). In the Netherlands too, a large number of anti-terrorist measures has surfaced since 9/11 without much resistance from society, even though infringement of privacy was an issue (Visser, pars. 1-4; De Graaf, pars. 10-30). Historian and terrorism-expert Beatrice de Graaf says Dutch citizens feel the threat of terrorism similar to the Americans (par. 1, 3). According to Altheide, “more than ever before, we focus on terrorism, disaster, and the impending doom that awaits us” (14). De Graaf argues that people need security, and stability to hang on to because of this (pars. 10-30). In line with this theory, Doss argues that “fear of terrorism’s looming threat to self and nation are managed in these... memorials through design elements... that stress security, stability, and heroism” (*Memorial Mania* 147). The Oversteek bridge is a great example of a memorial radiating stability and security, because the physical appearance of the bridge can be described with the same terms. Symbolically speaking as well, bridges represent direction, connections, and stability. The heroic nature of the crossing which the Oversteek bridge represents can also be seen as a way of celebrating freedom in an age of terrorism. It reminds the people of Nijmegen of their freedom, and underlines the importance of holding on to this ideal. Also, since the United States has been Nijmegen’s savior once before, the reference of the Oversteek bridge to the heroic actions of the Americans remind citizens of the security which the United States ones provided. To ensure those feelings of security, it can be beneficial to focus on heroism, and let go of the negative aspects of American presence in Nijmegen during the Second World War.

To sum up, the memory boom, which especially concerns the remembrance of the Second World War, can be explained by a combination of factors. The victims of the horrors of the war are increasingly asking for public recognition in the form of memorials. Simultaneously, the younger generation is realizing that the group of World War Two survivals is ageing, and will have disappeared completely in the nearby future. Both groups are valuing the passing down of Second World War testimonies to a greater extent because of these reasons. Mass

media in the form of films, books, and news is stressing the importance of remembrance, and is therefore stimulating the memory boom. Last, events such as 9/11 and the growing coverage of fear-related stories by the media are spreading anxieties about terrorism and insecurity. As a result, communities desire consolation in the form of memorials which represent security and heroism in this age of terrorism and fear. All these factors which have contributed to the growing interest in memory have caused memorials to become increasingly relevant to public life.

### **3.3. *Memorial Mania***

The relevance of memorials in public life has naturally resulted in an increase in public memorials. In other words, society is ‘memorializing.’ Erika Doss is one of the leading scholars in this field of study who has done extensive research on memorialization using the United States as a case study. In her research, she develops an elaborate portrait on what she calls ‘memorial mania.’ She defines memorial mania as “an obsession with issues of memory and history and an urgent desire to express and claim those issues in visibly public contexts” (Doss, *Memorial Mania* 2). So, Memorial mania does not only encompass the memory boom which can be seen in both public and academic life, but also the publicly visible outlets of the increasing interest in memory in the form of memorials. For a memorial is such a “claim” of “those issues in visibly public contexts,” and it is these memorials which Doss accentuates in her book *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America*.

Doss explains that she chose to call the phenomenon ‘memorial mania,’ first of all, because ‘mania’ typically stands for “an emotionally driven... illness,” and can be described as “the manifestation of social and cultural excess” (27-28). The term ‘mania’ therefore suits the phenomenon well, because it is characterized by emotions as well as excess. Although Doss stresses that the words ‘monument’ and ‘memorial’ can be used interchangeably, the term ‘memorial’ is more appropriate for the phenomenon than words as ‘monument’ or ‘statue’ according to her (38). The reason for this is that “the bronze memorial... gave way to large-scale abstract sculpture that flooded the public domain in the United States” as art historian Arlene Raven explains (qtd. in Doss, *Memorial Mania* 33). On top of that, contemporary memorials distinguish themselves from older monuments, because they are often “multivalent entities” (qtd. in Doss, *Memorial Mania* 37). Statues and other typical sculptures have made room for “new public art,” which embodies “art plus function,” such as “memorial bridges, fountains, and flagpoles” and “parks, gardens, ... auditoria, stadia, [and]

highways” (qtd. in Doss, *Memorial Mania* 33, 37; Doss, *Memorial Mania* 192). These functional memorials have become popular under the motto of “Honor the Dead. Serve the Living” in compliance with the new paradigm of memorialization which seeks to learn from the past in order to create a better and safer future (193).

As the subtitle of *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* suggests, public feeling is another important aspect of the research performed by Doss. In fact, “memorial mania is especially shaped by the affective conditions of public life in America today” according to her (*Memorial Mania* 2). While the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary describes ‘affect’ as an obsolete term for either “feeling” or “affection,” the word is frequently used in matters of memory or memorialization. In a short article titled “Affect” in *American Art*, Doss defines the term as “physically expressed emotion, or feeling” (9). She argues that affective emotions such as “grief, gratitude, fear, shame, anger, and hope” are gaining influence in public life in the United States (9). All in all, Doss believes “affect is omnipresent in contemporary American culture and society,” which has resulted in a connection between affect, and culture and memory (10). Affect is therefore often intertwined with memorials too, as they are the physical representation of a community’s affective emotions concerning a specific part of history (Doss, *Memorial Mania* 46, 59). Affect works the other way around as well. Due to its highly valued position in public life, memorials evoking affective emotions are “perceived as being more substantial, [and] more genuine” than those who lack affect (Doss, “Affect” 10). On top of that, since an affective memorial influences its audience on an emotional level and combines that with physical experience, it can easily manipulate the viewers’ idea on the subject the memorial represents (Doss, *Memorial Mania* 15). In other words, memorials show a community’s feelings on the subject it represents, and at the same time tell viewers how to feel about the subject. Because of this double-acting quality of memorials, it can be said that they function as shapers of collective identity.

Shaping collective identity can be a reason to build a memorial. According to sociologist Neil Smelser, governments increasingly make “deliberate efforts to remember the events collectively,” and are therefore interested in the “erection of monuments” in order to create a feeling of community among the citizens (Alexander et al. 267). This is not a new phenomenon however, as “monuments erected in the nineteenth and early twentieth century were built primarily in service of the nation state” as well (Gutman, Brown, and Sodaro, eds. 70). The focus of those memorials was usually to “celebrate [the dead’s] sacrifice for the great nation,” because that would lead to a reinforcement of collective identity, while the commemoration of the tragic death of an individual would not have such an effect (71).

Naturally, in order for a memorial to contribute to the sense of a shared identity, “controversial subjects” are often avoided, because those will interfere with the “imagined community” in a negative and annulling way (70). All in all, in times of societal distress, memorials can serve as a reconciling factor that brings communities together, because the people share the same culture and ideas. According to Erika Doss, the “vastly expanded U.S. demographic and... heightened expectations of rights and representation among the nation’s increasingly diverse publics” explains the need to reestablish a sense of collective identity (*Memorial Mania* 19).

Memorials are not always built solely in the interest of governments. Communities themselves can be agents in the erection of monuments as well. The growing number of memorials can be explained by Doss’ observation that people have a “heightened expectation of rights and representation” in the present day. Simultaneously with the desire of representation, people are becoming aware of the “powerful vehicle of visibility and authority” that public art has developed into (Doss, *Memorial Mania* 9, 19, 37). The desire to claim one’s rights can thus be fulfilled by the erection of a monument because of its powerful position in society. By asking for memorials, communities are demanding recognition and respect, which is at the same time precisely what they receive because of the memorial (2). Both governments and communities can thus be advocates of memorial-building, albeit for different reasons.

Besides those reasons to create a collective identity or claim recognition, memorials are also built with very obvious intentions, which are to remember the dead, and to preserve memories (Gutman, Brown, and Sodaro, eds. 76; Doss, *Memorial Mania* 7). As said before, memorials in the past were focused on the “sacrifice for the great nation,” but this focus has shifted to the mourning of the individual (Gutman, Brown, and Sodaro, eds. 71; Doss, *Memorial Mania* 48, 53). This shift assumes that the role of memorials is not simply to create the sentiment of solidarity anymore, but has become more personal. As many contemporary memorials are “disposed to individual memories and personal grievances,” and especially “to representations of tragedy and trauma,” the argument can be made that memorialization is a form of processing trauma (Doss, *Memorial Mania* 48). Sociologist Jeffrey Alexander agrees with Doss on the importance of processing traumas in the erection of monuments (Alexander et al. 253). According to him “the aim [of memorials] is to restore collective psychological health by lifting societal repression and restoring memory” (7). He argues that the building of memorials can be a ‘cure’ for trauma (23). To put it differently, the recognition of certain events through the building of memorials can relieve trauma in a society.

In conclusion, Erika Doss has thus detected an obsession with memory in the United States which expresses itself in an excessively emotional public context, often in the form of memorials. Affective emotions are significant in this culture of memorial mania, because they both direct and carry out public feeling. In this manner, the increasing number of memorials is shaping collective identity. Simultaneously, the public memory culture in the United States answers the desire of particular groups to be acknowledged. In extension, the memory culture is relevant for communities who suffer from a collective trauma, because memorials can build up to the resolution of those traumas. Ultimately, memorials disclose an array of useful purposes for societies.

### **3.4. *Memorial Mania* and the Oversteek Bridge**

Now that we have discussed memory theory and the concept of ‘memorial mania’ in detail, we can look at the Oversteek bridge with a new perspective in mind. Other aspects of memorial mania which have not yet been explained but are nevertheless relevant to the bridge will also be considered in the following subsection. When the Oversteek bridge is seen through the eyes of the new paradigm of memorialization, many similarities can be found. The bridge can in fact be seen as an authentic showcase of the new paradigm. First of all, the bridge is a typical example of the ‘new public art,’ which asks for “art plus function” (qtd. in Doss, *Memorial Mania* 33, Doss *Memorial Mania* 192). The bridge is first and foremost a functional structure which allows people to move from one end of the Waal river to the other, and can therefore not be a better example of the ‘art plus function’ feature of the new paradigm. The value of the bridge as memorial is barely visible, even when the commemorative plaques, which have been placed only recently, and the monument Lights Crossing are encountered (“Nijmegen wil herdenkingsplaquette”; “Herdenkingsplaquettes,” par. 1). Second, the Oversteek bridge aligns with the new paradigm of memorialization because of the importance of the relationship between past, present, and future (Gutman, Brown, and Sodaro, eds. 68). At the opening of the bridge, mayor Hubert Bruls emphasized the “interplay of past and future” by asserting that the bridge commemorates the past, and will improve mobility in the future (Gutman, Brown, and Sodaro, eds. 1; “Nijmegen viert,” par. 5-6). On top of that, the Oversteek bridge is a symbol of the continuing development of the northeastern part of Nijmegen. The goal of the bridge is thus to “create a better present and future” by honoring the past, and combining that with the needs of the city in the future (Gutman, Brown, and Sodaro, eds. 67).

An important aspect of memorial mania as described by Doss is a memorial's ability to evoke affective emotions in its audience. Possible affects which can be represented in memorials are "grief, gratitude, fear, shame, anger, and hope" (Doss, "Affect" 9). In the Oversteek bridge memorial, the affective emotion of gratitude can be seen. According to Doss, this affect is "urgently expressed today," especially in the context of the Second World War (*Memorial Mania* 190). Apparently, the Netherlands is as committed to "saying 'thank you' to 'the greatest generation,'" as the United States itself, since Doss proclaims this "has obviously become a popular commemorative project in contemporary America" (189-190). The 'thank you' which the Oversteek bridge is to the paratroopers who participated in the crossing, and according to Sunset Marcher Tim Ruijling, all the soldiers who fought to liberate Nijmegen in the Second World War, indicates that Nijmegen feels grateful for the presence of the United States Army in the Second World War (Personal Interview). According to Doss, these "authentic gestures of thanksgiving stem from individual and/ or collective feelings of inferiority" (*Memorial Mania* 195). This interesting statement which relates to the tie between Nijmegen and the United States will be discussed more elaborately in chapter four. All in all, the Oversteek bridge is a perfect example of an affective memorial representing gratitude. According to Doss, many contemporary memorials have a "threefold purpose," which is, apart from expressing thankfulness, "remembrance, and inspiration" (192). The Oversteek bridge as memorial transmits precisely these three qualities, as it both honors and remembers the men who crossed the Waal river in September 1944, and inspires people to continue to improve the city of Nijmegen in the future, because the crossing was also a sign of Nijmegen moving forward in the past. On top of that, the bridge inspires initiatives such as the Sunset March, which convey the importance of remembering.

Memorials are thus often built with the intention to create a collective identity. A large number of memorials is impersonal, and focuses on the greater good, the "sacrifice for the great nation" (Gutman, Brown, and Sodaro, eds. 71). However, it was established earlier that contemporary memorials frequently focus on the individual instead, which may be the result of a trauma which has to be processed (71; Doss, *Memorial Mania* 48). The Oversteek bridge memorial contains features of both tendencies. On the one hand, the memorial bridge is very impersonal, because the fact that it is a bridge symbolizes the military action of the crossing. The crossing was an important step forward in the liberation of Nijmegen, and therefore contributed to 'the greater good' of defeating Nazi Germany. The fact that the monument Lights Crossing focuses on the sacrifice of 48 specific soldiers makes it more personal, especially when the book *De Oversteek: Zoektocht naar 48 Amerikaanse Oorlogshelden*

containing personal life stories of the fallen soldiers is seen as an element of the memorial. Death itself, however, is not present in the memorial bridge, which is a sign of trauma according to Doss (*Memorial Mania* 101). Especially the book by *De Gelderlander* is a great example of this, since it “focus[es] on the dead as they were once alive,” yet another sign of trauma (101). Therefore, the Oversteek bridge can be seen as a coping strategy attempting to resolve a trauma. Trauma is thus an important factor in the memorialization of the Oversteek bridge. In conclusion, the Oversteek bridge is perfectly in line with the new paradigm of memorialization which surfaced three decades ago, and can also be ascribed to the phenomenon of memorial mania. The situation in the United States with regard to memory is thus compatible with that in Nijmegen up to a point, as the same symptoms can be observed. Most important in the discussion of the Oversteek bridge as a paradox of World War Two commemoration however, is the possibility of the bridge to resolve trauma in the community. This suggests the people of Nijmegen might suffer from a trauma related to the Americans in the Second World War. The topic of trauma will therefore be examined in the next chapter.



## Chapter 4: Relevance of the Monument

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, coping with a sense of trauma is an important and likely reason for communities to build memorials and engage in other commemoration practices such as ceremonies. Memory theory is therefore closely related to trauma theory. To gain a complete understanding of the relevance of memorialization to a community such as the people of Nijmegen, trauma theory will be discussed elaborately in the following chapter. Towards the end, the purpose of the memorialization of the Oversteek bridge will become apparent, and the question why the bridge was turned into a monument can then finally be answered.

### 4.1. Trauma Theory

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines the term ‘trauma’ as either “an injury (as a wound) to living tissue caused by an extrinsic agent,” “a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury,” or “an emotional upset.” The first definition concerns physical trauma, and is therefore not relevant to the discussion of World War Two commemoration practices. However, the second and third definition by the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary describe the use of the term ‘trauma’ in trauma and memory theory fairly well. Expert in the field of trauma theory Cathy Caruth characterizes ‘trauma’ as “the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena” (91). According to Caruth, an event which evolves into a trauma is always followed by a period of latency, in which “the effects of the experience are not apparent” (17). During this period, the person who has experienced the event is not yet aware of the trauma, and as Sigmund Freud describes it “gets away apparently unharmed” (qtd. in Caruth 17). University Professors Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas refer to the term ‘latency’ in their book *The Image and the Witness* as “a defense mechanism for self-preservation,” in which “the mind literally blocks the traumatized subject from actually experiencing the event at the time it occurs” (10). After the period of latency, in which the trauma is thus repressed, a “literal return of the past” takes place and the person is then often haunted by a repetitive and unavoidable reliving of the traumatic experience (Caruth 59;

Guerin, and Hallas, eds. 10). The trauma cannot be remembered, and eventually resolved, until that stage has been reached (Alexander et al. 113).

The topic of incomprehensibility is inseparable from trauma theory. Cathy Caruth argues in her book *Unclaimed Experience* that it is in fact the incomprehensibility of an experience which makes it traumatic (6). The period of latency is thus the result of “an inherent latency within the experience itself,” or in other words, the not knowing or not being conscious during the traumatic experience (Caruth 4, 6, 17). Trauma therefore becomes a paradox of “knowing and not knowing” as it shifts from forgetting to reliving the traumatic event (17). Another paradox which can be found in traumas according to Caruth’s work is the paradox of death and survival (7). The question she asks herself is whether “trauma [is] the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it” (7). She elaborates on the topic by using an example from research by Sigmund Freud. When a person dreams of a traumatic experience, the “emotional upset,” as the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary describes the term ‘trauma’, does not set in until after the dream, at the moment of awakening. Earlier than that moment, individuals do not realize they have survived the experience, and it can therefore be said they have survived “without knowing it” (Caruth 64). Accordingly, the traumatic moment is not the memory of almost dying, but instead the realization that one is still alive. The purpose of the repetition which is experienced after the period of latency is thus to become familiar with the realization of one’s own survival in order to understand it (64). The importance of the paradoxes of trauma are accentuated when Caruth suggests that she views “trauma as a theory of the peculiar incomprehensibility of human survival” (58).

Although Caruth’s ground-breaking work in the field of trauma is useful for the research on the Oversteek bridge as a paradox of World War Two commemoration, the book *Unclaimed Experience* only slightly includes the idea of communities in its theory, and focuses mainly on the individual. Trauma is not only relevant to the individual however, but also to communities, for one because victims of traumatic experiences are “asking to be seen and heard” which Caruth points out herself (9). For trauma theory to become a solid contributor to the explanation of the Oversteek bridge in Nijmegen as a monument, community, in the sense of a possible collective trauma, has to be recognized. After all, memory and shared identity are closely related. On top of that, the commemoration of the historical event which the Oversteek bridge represents concerns the entire population of Nijmegen, and not only the people who were part of that history. Caruth agrees with this notion of collectiveness by indicating that “history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s traumas,” (24). Although she does not discuss the topic of collectiveness any

further, she implies in this statement that history is determined by how engaged people feel in traumas that are not their own. This yet again reveals the importance of collectivity in trauma and memory theory. This understanding of trauma and its relation to communities is discussed by several other scholars. University Professor and memoirist Nancy Miller and her colleague Jason Tougaw claim in their book *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community* for instance that “the term ‘trauma’ describes the experience of both victims – those who have suffered directly – and those who suffer with them, or through them, or for them, if only by reading about trauma” (2). They indicate that those who suffer from a trauma do not have to be directly involved in the experience, but can also be indirect victims who either experience the results or simply become familiar with the traumatic event, be it at a different time and place. Yale University Sociology Professor Ron Eyerman agrees with this notion as he states that “direct experience is not a necessary condition for the appearance of trauma” (Alexander et al. 71). Considering Miller, Tougaw, and Eyerman’s view, the generation of people that lives in Nijmegen today can be victim of a Second World War trauma as much as the generation who actually lived through the Second World War.

In collaboration with a group of influential sociologists, Ron Eyerman has devised a theory on collective trauma which has been published in a book in 2004 under the title of *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. One of the contributors, Jeffrey C. Alexander, explains cultural trauma as follows: “cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander et al. 1). Cultural trauma can thus be seen as a collective trauma, because it affects a community instead of an individual or small group. Alexander and his co-authors believe that trauma is not a natural phenomenon, but “constructed by society,” and they have shaped an eye-opening theory which explores the process of trauma-creation (2). To construct their theory, the sociologists first established an understanding of the current notions on trauma, which they call “lay theory” (2). This theory assumes “the trauma ... emerge[s] from events themselves,” and “being traumatized is the natural response to that” (2-3). Within the ‘lay theory’ one can distinguish two versions, which are “enlightenment thinking,” and “psychoanalytical thinking” (3,5). The enlightenment thinking has a rather positive view on trauma, since supporters believe that the reactions to traumas are “efforts to alter the circumstances that caused them” and therefore inherently solve the problems in a community (3). The experience which caused the trauma will no longer evoke strong traumatic feelings and emotions once the problems have been

solved, and as a result the trauma will disappear (3). The psychoanalytical approach to the ‘lay trauma theory’ is focused on “unconscious emotional fears,” which can result in the repression of the traumatic experience altogether (5). This theory is largely in line with research in trauma theory conducted by both Sigmund Freud, and academics such as Caruth, Miller, and Tougaw, and is therefore called the “academic version of lay theory” in the sociologists’ work (Alexander et al. 5).

According to Alexander, both the ‘enlightenment’ and the ‘psychoanalytical’ thinking contain a “naturalistic fallacy,” which the authors of *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* repudiate (Alexander et al. 8). As said before, the ‘lay trauma theory’ assumes trauma is a natural occurring phenomenon, while the truth according to Alexander and his colleagues is that traumas are creations of society (8). They reason that “events are not inherently traumatic... [but] trauma is a socially mediated attribution,” as it is created by the mere notion of an alteration in collective identity (8). The “trauma process” which leads to the creation of a trauma is described as follows: agents, who are also members of the social group they address, have to make claims about the values of their collective identity which have supposedly shifted (11). “Four critical representations are essential” to create the trauma claim, all four of which must be transmitted to the community (12). These representations are “1. the nature of the pain. What actually happened to the ... collectivity”; “2. the nature of the victim,” where the agent has to point out “what group of persons was affected by this traumatizing pain;” 3. the “relation of the trauma victim to the wider audience,” where it is important to create a sense of shared identity between the audience and the trauma victim; and 4. the “attribution of responsibility,” where the perpetrator has to be specified, so the audience will understand “who caused the trauma” (13-15).

The events which are discussed in this theses, and which are possibly traumatic experiences for the people of Nijmegen, occurred over seventy years ago during the Second World War. It therefore seems unlikely that the commemoration of the crossing of the Waal river or the bombing of the city in 1944 are a result of a collective trauma in the Nijmegen collectivity of today. The theory of cultural trauma holds, however, that trauma claims can be made at any time in history (Alexander et al. 8). The claim can be made either at the moment the event occurs, or “after the event has concluded,” and even anticipating the event (8). This suggests that the people of Nijmegen might very well suffer from a trauma in the present day, even if the traumatizing event occurred as long ago as the Second World War. Both sociologist Piotr Sztompka and trauma expert Cathy Caruth share this view, but also emphasize that either a personal or a collective trauma can be “enduring, [and] lingering,” and

can be passed on from one generation to the next, meaning that the people of Nijmegen may have been suffering from a trauma for several generations, even if it originates from an event which happened as long ago as the Second World War (Alexander et al. 162; Caruth 71).

#### **4.2. The Six Stages of Trauma**

Now that the process of trauma shaping has been discussed, we can advance to the progress of a collective trauma. According to Piotr Sztompka there are six stages in the course of trauma. The first stage is the traumatic experience itself, which Sztompka identifies as “traumatogenic change” (Alexander et al. 168). Traumatogenic change consist of several features as well. The first feature is “speed,” and Sztompka points out social change has to be “sudden and rapid, occurring within a span of time relatively short for a given kind of process” (158). The second feature is “scope,” which has to be “wide, [and] comprehensive” for a social change to become traumatic, “either in the sense that it touches many aspects of life... or that it affects many actors and many actions...” (158-159). The third feature of traumatogenic change according to Sztompka is that it has to “[touch] the core aspects of social life or personal fate” and is therefore “radical, deep, [and] fundamental” (159). The final trait which causes social change to become traumatogenic is that it is “unexpected, surprising” or “shocking,” which Sztompka describes as an “unbelieving mood” that descends upon a community (159). In his contribution to *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Sztompka continues by specifying different sources that can lead to traumatogenic change, and therefore to a cultural trauma. These sources are “intensifying intercultural contact... intensifying spatial mobility... change of fundamental institutions, [and] change of ideas” (162-163). The sources of traumatogenic change which are relevant for the case study of Nijmegen will be elaborated in chapter 4.3.

Returning to the course of trauma, the second stage is the “disorganization of culture,” which entails a change in a community’s belief system, morals, or ideas for instance (Alexander et al. 168). The third stage in the course of a trauma is closely related to the second stage, but concerns areas other than culture. It involves “traumatizing situations or events... affecting the life-world of the people” (168-169). This can for example mean the loss of material belongings due to a war, or a famine as a result of an economic crisis. The fourth stage of trauma is “traumatic condition,” which is “expressed by a set of traumatic symptoms, mental or behavioral” (169). As examples of these symptoms of trauma Sztompka mentions the “distrust syndrome,” closely related to having a “bleak picture of the future,” and reinventing a “nostalgic image of the past” (178-180). The fifth stage consists of

“posttraumatic adaptations employing various strategies of coping with trauma” (169). These coping strategies are important in the trauma process, because they create mitigating circumstances which can relieve the trauma symptoms within a community. On top of that, the coping strategies define a relevant step towards “overcoming trauma”, which is the sixth and final stage in the trauma process described by Piotr Sztompka (169).

The authors of *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* offer various coping strategies in different parts of the book. Neil J. Smelser, Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the University of California at Berkeley describes the following “modes of defense,” which can be interpreted as coping strategies as well:

1. to block the threatening intrusion (e.g., denial),
2. to reverse the threatening intrusion into its opposite (e.g., to convert contempt into awe),
3. to shift reference of the threatening intrusion (e.g., projection), and
4. to insulate the threatening intrusion from its associative connections (e.g., depersonalization). (45).

Smelser describes the first coping strategy as a “form of amnesia,” because the trauma is forgotten by either “denial” or “emotional paralysis” (53). Although Cathy Caruth argues “forgetting is indeed a necessary part of understanding,” this coping strategy is unfavorable, because it will not result in a situation in which a community can reach the final stage of the trauma process (32). Therefore, the “threatening intrusion” must not be blocked if the trauma is ever to be resolved. A more fruitful coping strategy which can result in the exceeding of the traumatic situation is thus the opposite of Smelser’s first ‘mode of defense.’ A trauma must be publicly “recognized” so a community will be allowed to express “emotions of loss and mourning” according to both Doss and Alexander (*Memorial Mania* 191; Alexander et al. 7). Commemorating practices and memorials are beneficial means to overcome a cultural trauma, because they recognize the trauma as such.

As said before, the sixth and final stage of the trauma process is resolving and thereby overcoming the trauma (Alexander et al. 169). Once this step has emerged, it can be recognized in society by the formation of a redefined collective identity. This ‘new’ collective identity may resemble the community’s ‘old’ identity before the trauma occurred. However, returning to old values and traditions may also be an attempt “to deflect cultural trauma” (168). This can be a sign that the trauma is repressed, in which case it cannot be resolved (168). Expert in the field of collective identity Bernhard Giesen also states that the repression of trauma is an unproductive factor in shaping a collective identity. According to him, the

process “cannot escape from an orientation toward the past,” which means that the past cannot be ignored or forgotten (112). Therefore, “efforts to remember” the past such as commemoration ceremonies, the building of memorials, and other commemorative practices are essential for the construction of a collective identity. This concept became apparent in memory theory as well (267). The importance of remembering is emphasized by Erika Doss, who calls the efforts to do so “key to the formation and reformation of [collective] identity” (*Memorial Mania* 48). After considering the theories presented in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, the Oversteek bridge can be seen as an example of a coping strategy in the process of overcoming a trauma and creating a collective identity among the people of Nijmegen. In that case, the history of Nijmegen has to contain an unresolved trauma. Only then would the public desire the Oversteek bridge to be converted into a monument.

### **4.3. Collective Trauma in Nijmegen**

When the Oversteek bridge is viewed as a remedy for a traumatic experience in the past of Nijmegen, it can easily be assumed that the event which the bridge commemorates: the crossing of the Waal river by American troops in 1944, is in fact the trauma that has to be resolved. However, due to tendencies to repress traumas or displace them to another origin, there is also a possibility that the crossing is not the trauma which gave rise to the memorialization of the Oversteek bridge after all (Alexander et al. 45, 47). Keeping the history of Nijmegen in mind, the bombing of the city in February 1944 stands out as a possible traumatic event, because it is connected to the Oversteek bridge in multiple ways. First of all, both events share the same actor, which is the American Army. Second of all, both events took place in a relatively small time-period, and both were part of operations with the intention to contribute to the liberation of Europe during the Second World War. On top of that, both operations had major setbacks for the Allied Forces as well as the people of Nijmegen. Therefore, it is crucial in the discussion of World War Two commemoration practices to examine both the bombing and the crossing as possible cultural traumas for the people of Nijmegen.

#### **4.3.1. The Crossing as Trauma**

According to Bernhard Giesen, trauma always “refers to a source” (Alexander et al. 113). As discussed in the previous paragraph, the most apparent source of the trauma in Nijmegen for

which the Oversteek bridge is a remedy is the crossing. According to Jeffrey Alexander, “personalizing the trauma and its characters” is one way in which memorials relieve traumatic emotions in a community (231). As was explained in the previous chapter, the Oversteek bridge personalizes the crossing. The focus on the specific 48 soldiers who died during the crossing in 1944, a focus which is reinforced by the book *De Oversteek: Zoektocht naar 48 Amerikaanse Oorlogshelden*, causes the trauma to be brought “back home” to the people of Nijmegen (231). The 48 soldiers are given a name, and the trauma is depicted “in terms of small groups, families and friends, parents and children, brothers and sisters” (231). In other words, it becomes a story of fellow humans, resulting in an augmented sense of compassion of the Nijmegen citizens for the American soldiers (231-232). The crossing was much less personalized before the building of the monument Lights Crossing, and the publishing of the book. The new developments have thus contributed to the personalization to a large extent. Since personalization is a sign of a collective trauma, this suggests that the crossing is a ‘new’ trauma, which did not exist before the bridge did. On top of that, one of the conditions of cultural trauma is that it “must be remembered” (36). The fact that remembrance has been given a boost by the bridge also suggests that it is a ‘new’ trauma. However, the trauma can also be surfacing now instead of in the last seventy years because of the period of latency (Caruth 17). This means the trauma has always been there, but the community simply was not aware of it.

Another condition for a cultural or collective trauma to emerge according to the authors of *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* is the presence of negative affects such as disgust, grief, shame, anger, or guilt (Alexander et al. 36, 40-41). At first glance, these emotions do not seem to play a role in public memory of the crossing. However, Operation Market Garden, part of which was the crossing, led to Nijmegen’s period as a front-line city. The memory of the crossing might go hand-in-hand with the negative affects connected to this aspect of Operation Market Garden. The crossing is usually seen by the public as the liberation of Nijmegen though, and I have previously discussed that the Oversteek bridge is especially surrounded by feelings of gratitude. This affective emotion is known to be a cure in the trauma process, and not a cause (Doss, *Memorial Mania* 195). Therefore, I argue that the negative affects associated with the crossing are not strong enough to result in a collective trauma (Alexander et al. 36). Rather, it reinforces the idea that the Oversteek bridge is a coping strategy hoping to resolve a trauma.

The lack of negative affects, and the stress on positive ones, does not necessarily mean there is no collective trauma involved. The positiveness surrounding the case study can in fact



be a sign of trauma, because one of the defenses against it according to Neil Smelser is “to convert a negative event into a positive one” (Alexander et al. 54). Doss agrees with the sociologist, and adds that gratitude contributes to this by attempting to “transcend misery and depression and make the world a happier place” (*Memorial Mania* 195). The affect of gratitude can thus predominate to mask negative feelings which are at the basis of public feeling in Nijmegen. This theory can also apply to the bigger picture of American involvement in Nijmegen during the Second World War. Public feeling emphasizes on gratefulness for the actions of the American soldiers in order to mask deeper feelings of anger and grief which originate from the bombing and negative aspects of Operation Market Garden. This would mean however, that not the crossing, but the bombing is the actual cultural trauma.

#### **4.3.2. The Bombing as Trauma**

The bombing in February 1944 by the American Air Force is the second possibility for a collective trauma in Nijmegen. As described in the previous paragraph, the Oversteek bridge memorial can function as a remedy for this trauma, because the bridge turns the negative feelings about the American involvement in the Second World War in something positive for the citizens of Nijmegen. To find out whether the bombing is indeed the traumatic experience which has led to the memorialization of the Oversteek bridge, the event will now be discussed on the basis of the theory in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. The importance of negative affects in the construction of a cultural trauma has been discussed in the previous paragraph (Alexander et al. 36). It was difficult to find negative affects influencing public feeling in the memory of the crossing. The memory of the bombing however, goes hand in hand with negative affects such as disgust, anger, and especially grief. According to Erika Doss, grief is “the expression of deep emotional anguish, usually about death and loss” (*Memorial Mania* 80). This public feelings in Nijmegen is the result of the “death and loss” which followed the bombing, as 766 citizens were killed, and hundreds of buildings were destroyed (80). On top of that, Nijmegen also lost faith in the Allied Forces, since the Americans were supposed to liberate the city, and not destroy it.

The probability of the bombing as trauma, or rather, the negative component of the American presence in Nijmegen during the Second World War, seems feasible. Applying Piotr Sztompka’s six stages of trauma to the case study of the bombing can determine whether the event really has brought forth a cultural trauma for the people of Nijmegen. Sztompka’s

first stage in the course of trauma, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is traumatogenic change. This change has to be “sudden, comprehensive, deep, and unexpected” (Alexander et al. 168). Evidently, all those requirements are present in the case of the bombing of the inner city. The catastrophe was completely unanticipated, and influenced all aspects of citizen life. The second stage of trauma depicted by Sztompka is “disorganization of culture,” and can for instance involve a change in a community’s belief system, or ideas (168). This was indeed the case with the Nijmegen and the bombing, because the idea of the Americans as saviors and liberators of the city altered after they became known as the perpetrators who had dropped the bombs on the city. Although the Germans were soon blamed for the attack, Rosendaal argues that the citizens remained troubled with the idea that their supposed ‘friends,’ and ‘saviors’ had now destroyed the city (*The Destruction of Nijmegen* 9). It was hard for the citizens to comprehend the nature of the attack, and as was explained in the first chapter, it still is today (Sliepenbeek 7). According to Caruth, “what cannot be grasped” often becomes traumatic, which increases the probability that the bombing is at the basis of a cultural trauma in Nijmegen (68). The emergence of the trauma according to Caruth then becomes an “attempt to master what was never fully grasped in the first place” (62).

The third stage of trauma as explained by Sztompka is the emergence of “traumatizing situations or events... affecting the life-world of the people” (Alexander et al. 168-169). For Nijmegen, these are the shocking situations after the bombing, which can be seen as traumas in the more psychological sense of the word. Many people had to deal with deceased family members, friends, or neighbors, and with the notion that they had survived the attack, while others had not. Caruth argues that this notion of survival can be the cause for a personal trauma (64). Other situations affecting people’s social and physical environment after the bombing are the loss of houses, stores, and other buildings. In general, daily life in the city center of Nijmegen changed drastically because of this (Rosendaal, *The Destruction of Nijmegen* 25, 73). The fourth stage of the trauma process is the “traumatic condition” in which “traumatic symptoms” become apparent (Alexander et al. 169). As illustrated in chapter 4.2., examples of such traumatic symptoms are the “distrust syndrome,” and having a “bleak picture of the future” (178, 180). Both of these symptoms were present in Nijmegen shortly after the bombing. The attack by the Americans caused the people of Nijmegen to lose faith in the capability of the Allied Forces to liberate Europe. Although one mistake does not necessarily prove the incompetence of an actor, many citizens thought the liberation of their city would never become a reality, and lost hope in a future in liberty.

Coping strategies such as denial and projection comprise the fifth stage of the trauma process (Alexander et al. 169). Smelser's coping strategies from chapter 4.2. which are relevant to the involvement of the Americans in Nijmegen during the Second World War are "denial... convert[ing] contempt into awe," and "projection" (45). First, to attend to the traumatic symptoms of distrust and loss of hope for the future, the fact that the Americans were the perpetrators was denied soon after the bombing. This denial continued until the twenty-first century, and is only slowly starting to vanish because of Professor Rosendaal's books advocating the acknowledgement of the mistake, and because of renewed interests in remembering the past. Earlier in this chapter, the unhealthy consequences of denial were treated (Caruth 32). As said before, denial of a trauma will not lead to resolution. Not only denial by the community itself can endanger the resolution of a trauma, but denial by an outside group as well. According to Philosophy Professor Kelly Oliver "the experience of marginalization... is traumatic for its victims" (7). A cultural trauma is thus present more often in communities where the traumatogenic change is not recognized as such by others. Smelser agrees with this as he states that "historical events that may not be traumatic for other societies are more likely to be traumas in afflicted societies" (Alexander et al. 36). The lack of recognition for the bombing by both the Dutch and the American government can therefore be one of the causes for the traumatization of Nijmegen citizens in the past, as well as today. Besides denying the trauma, the people of Nijmegen also changed the "reference of the threatening intrusion" to sooth their feelings of distrust and doubt (45). By projecting their anger on the German Army, and blaming it for the bombing, the community did not have to fear the Americans for destroying the city, and could therefore retain hope of liberation (Rosendaal, *The Destruction of Nijmegen* 62, 97). To conclude, a coping strategy to deal with the trauma used in present day Nijmegen is the "[reversal] of the threatening intrusion to its opposite" (Alexander et al. 45). The involvement of the United States Army is celebrated with the monument of the Oversteek bridge in Nijmegen today, and is therefore averted from the disastrous bombing. Both citizens of Nijmegen in the past and in the present thus exhibit coping strategies in the struggle to resolve the trauma of the Second World War. This means that the last stage of the trauma process, overcoming the trauma, has not yet been reached.

All in all, the case study of American engagement in Second World War Nijmegen can be compared to an example Caruth uses in her book *Unclaimed Experience*. She explains that "traumatic separation from the father [who is murdered], ultimately leads to a belated attempt to return to the moment before the murder" (69). In the commemorative culture of Nijmegen, the United States can be seen as the 'father,' as it was supposed to protect the city. After the

‘murder,’ which is represented by the bombing in the case of Nijmegen, the community separated itself from the ‘father’ because it no longer felt protected. Eventually, the community returned to the situation before the bombing, in which the United States was seen as protector and liberator again. This process is reinforced by the memorialization of the Oversteek bridge. Caruth claims that the trauma in her example is not the murder itself, but the forgetting of the murder (69). For Nijmegen this means that the negative aspects of the American presence during the Second World War must be recognized in order to overcome the trauma.

#### **4.4. Resolution**

All in all, the argument that the citizens of Nijmegen are suffering from a trauma is valid. The trauma originates from the American presence in the city during the Second World War. This includes both the bombing, Operation Market Garden and the liberation of the city, and the time after the Operation which was marked by the front-line period. The bombing and the front-line period in which the population had to deal with looting soldiers, for instance, have made the overall experience of Americans in Nijmegen during the war a negative one. However, the American troops also showed to be heroic and selfless in their attempts to liberate the city. This paradoxical view of the United States during the war caused confusion among the inhabitants, and has eventually lead to a cultural trauma. Cathy Caruth uses an example in *Unclaimed Experience* to indicate the traumatizing nature of such confusion between liberation and destruction. She points to the film about the Second World War *Hiroshima mon Amour* directed by Alain Resnais, in which a woman’s lover dies on the same day as the liberation of her city. According to Caruth, “the simultaneous occurrence of the event of liberation and the event of his death” is extremely traumatic, and eventually drives her into madness (30). She tries to overcome her trauma by forgetting about her lover, and therefore “betray[ing] the past” (33). Caruth argues however, that the past must be acknowledged in order to solve the “problem of how not to betray the past” (27). The people of Nijmegen face the same dilemma, as they have forgotten about the negative side of the American involvement, and focus on the positive aspects. The Oversteek bridge is the physical representation of that, because the memorial only celebrates the American presence in Nijmegen during the Second World War, and does not represent the bombing. Although memorialization can be a step towards resolving trauma, the destructive side of the American presence must be recognized as well to obtain a complete resolution. Indeed, the “unspeakable

experience” must be turned “into a story that can be communicated” as Bernhard Giesen puts it (Alexander et al. 113).

#### **4.5. The United States and Nijmegen After the War**

The quest to discover why the community of Nijmegen would benefit from the Oversteek bridge as a monument has led us to the assumption that the public is traumatized by the complex relationship with the United States during the Second World War. However, this trauma does not seem to affect public life in the city to a large extent. The United States is mainly celebrated when it comes to their actions in the war. However, the feelings of confusion deriving from the double function of the American troops in World War Two as both liberators and destroyers can be present on an unconscious level in society. The findings in this thesis can reveal the dynamics of the relationship between the United States and Nijmegen in the present day.

First, as mentioned before, the fact that the United States is applauded for their intervention in Nijmegen during the Second World War despite their contested role in the bombing suggests that Nijmegen feels inferior to the United States (Doss, *Memorial Mania* 195). Doss argues that memorials conveying a message of gratitude indicate that the ‘inferior’ party feels pressured to “acknowledge social debt” (190). American paratroopers gave their life to secure freedom for the people of Nijmegen, so the time has come for Nijmegen to ‘give back.’ Tim Ruijling also touches upon this notion of social debt in his interview. Although he initiated the Sunset March completely voluntarily and is “proud to be a Sunset Marcher,” it can be seen as a sense of duty which makes him want to pay respect to the 48 fallen soldiers every night without fail. The feeling of inferiority might explain the emphasis of the bombing to be on the victims, and never on the United States as perpetrators. Especially during the war, the role of the American troops was ignored, because not only did Nijmegen feel inferior to the United States, they felt dependent on them as well. Without the help of the powerful United States, the people in Nijmegen believed that the war against Nazi Germany could never be won (Rosendaal, *Nijmegen '44* 169-201). The United States is still a super power, and it is important to a small country as the Netherlands to retain a good relationship with the Americans.

The relationship described by inferiority and superiority works the other way around as well. The United States has barely taken responsibility for the bombing over the years, which shows that they do not share the same sense of duty to ‘give back’ to the people of Nijmegen.

Even though the United States has ‘given back’ after the war through initiatives such as the Marshall Plan, a specific act of reciprocity for the bombing has not occurred. According to Doss, the Americans only pay attention to those who “count... who is telling the tale” (*Memorial Mania* 316). Apparently, the bombing of Nijmegen by the American Air Force is not a story that is told by ‘those who count’. There is a story about the relationship between the American troops and Nijmegen that is told though. According to Ruijling, the crossing is a well-known anecdote often shared by the American Airborne Division among their men. The heroism of the Waal crossers is highlighted, and the military action on the Waal river has become a great example of patriotism to the soldiers. The interest of the American Army in the Waal crossing crosses borders, as the Sunset Marchers has received rare ‘coins of excellence’ for their effort to remember the fallen soldiers. In short, the United States shows its feelings of superiority over Nijmegen by emphasizing on the positive side of their intervention in the Second World War, and by marginalizing the negative side. All in all, the feelings of inferiority and especially dependency can explain the need to view the United States as a positive entity which looks after the safety of the Netherlands. Therefore, it is beneficial for the people of Nijmegen to emphasize the heroic crossing instead of the horrific bombing.

## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis is to determine how memory studies can explain the dedication of the Oversteek bridge to the crossing, taking the paradox of the United States as both liberator and destroyer of Nijmegen during the Second World War into consideration. The Oversteek bridge built in 2013 is a monument for the 48 men who died at the crossing of the Waal river on September 20, 1944 by the 82<sup>nd</sup> American Airborne Division. The crossing contributed to the liberation of the city from the Nazi Army. The Oversteek bridge is a paradox of World War Two commemoration, because it glorifies the actions of the American troops while ignoring the bombing. This while 766 people lost their lives, and the city center was destroyed in the bombing by the United States Air Force.

In this thesis, it was discovered that the people of Nijmegen still suffer from a trauma resulting from the paradoxical relationship with the United States during the Second World War. The representation of the American actions in the war is focused on heroism at the crossing, while the involvement in the bombing is largely ignored. The trauma is nourished by this unhealthy balance between the liberator and destroyer side of the American intervention in the war. Referring to memory studies, the Oversteek bridge can be a strategy for the city of Nijmegen to cope with the war trauma. The negative memory of the Americans as destroyers of the city is overturned by the positive memory of the crossing. In other words, the Oversteek bridge compensates for the trauma of the bombing by celebrating the heroic actions of the American soldiers at the crossing. Other reasons for the Oversteek bridge to be turned into a monument can be found in memory studies as well. First, the bridge is an example of a lasting memory of the Second World War, which is becoming increasingly important as the war generation is dying out. Second, public recognition of the horrors of war is a global trend. Third, the bridge symbolizes stability and security, which can console people in an age which is marked by terrorist threats.

It has thus been established that the celebratory memorial of the Oversteek bridge is an attempt to overcome the trauma. However, it is important that both trauma and triumph are represented in public life, because both are part of collective identity (Alexander et al. 114). The Schommel monument leaves out an important part of the bombing's history, which is the fact that it was caused by the United States. According to Doss, it is "required[d] that we understand the past, not only celebrate it" (*Memorial Mania* 258). Therefore, it is important to show the public all aspects of the bombing's history. On top of that, the editors of *Memory*

*and the Future* argue that “public acknowledgement is one of the only modes of repair” in cases of collective trauma involving many a large number of victims (Gutman, Brown, and Sodaro, eds. 76). This indicates the importance of the recognition of the Americans as destroyers of Nijmegen as well. Since both the Oversteek bridge and the Schommel do not acknowledge this fact, Nijmegen is in need of an alteration or addition to its range of memorials in order to remember the Americans as liberators as well as destroyers of the city.

Nijmegen would benefit from an alteration or addition to its monuments that does justice to the paradoxical history of United States intervention in the Second World War. Ideally, a monument would pay special attention to, or unite, the destroyer and liberator side which the United States had in the war. This history, in all of its complexity, is what defines Nijmegen, and distinguishes it from other Dutch cities. A monument uniting the paradoxical role of the United States could truly acknowledge the complex history and help its citizens work through the cultural trauma of the bombing. However, the trauma cannot be fully overcome without recognition from the Dutch national government, as marginalization is bound to reinstate feelings of trauma (Oliver 7). More important, the United States needs to take responsibility for their actions on February 22, 1944 (Doss, *Memorial Mania* 264, 283). It would be a great step forward in the recognition of their mistake if the ambassador to the Netherlands would apologize in his next speech at the commemoration of the bombing. If the negative side of American intervention in Nijmegen during the Second World War is represented in society, the paradoxical quality of the Oversteek bridge might subside. The bridge can then serve as an uncomplicated symbol of gratitude for the part the United States played in the liberation of the city. This would build a better future for the city of Nijmegen void of trauma, which is in line with the ideas of the new paradigm of memorialization to create a better future by learning from the past (Gutman, Brown, and Sodaro, eds. 68).



## **Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the research which was conducted in this thesis uncovering the reasons for the Oversteek bridge to be turned into a monument, suggestions for additional research can be made. Some ideas for further research can be devised from the conclusions of this current research. First of all, extended research can be done which builds on the recommendation made in this study to incorporate the complexity of the United States involvement in Nijmegen during the Second World War into a single monument. Following this advice, a new study could gather information about what type of memorial could reconcile the role of the United States as liberator and destroyer, and would be suitable in this case study resulting in the alleviation of the cultural trauma. Second, it will be interesting to conduct research into the effect of the alleviation of trauma on the relationship between the United States and Nijmegen. Although this study suggests a closer relationship between the two based on the admiration for the United States war efforts, this theory has not undergone any testing. This might be relevant however to anticipate on future societal changes in case the war trauma is coped with.

Third, an angle which has not been dealt with in this research is the public opinion on the United States formed in the years after the war. This could possibly be relevant to the case study however, because it may have influenced the feelings of trauma in society. Therefore, the trauma process might have had some components which were not discussed in this thesis. The Marshall Plan and the connection between Nijmegen and the city of Albany, New York are situations which could have altered the public opinion on the American involvement in the war for example. The reason for these factors not to be taken into consideration in this study is that the involvement of them would ask for a much longer and in depth type of study such as a doctorate.

Fourth, an aspect which could have been elaborated on is the influence of terrorism on the memory boom. Although the point was addressed, it was not analyzed in depth because of the limited scope of this thesis. On top of that, I expected it not to alter the findings to such a degree that it required elaborate treatment. Terrorism is a contemporary and relevant theme however, and it therefore deserves attention in additional research. The same reason for terrorism to be discussed only marginally explains why a fifth point of interest was not treated thoroughly either. The memorial remembering the bombing of Nijmegen, the Schommel, can be an interesting case study as well. It commemorates the bombing, but death, destruction,

and the role of the American Forces in the affair are not visible. Research can be conducted into the lacking need of these factors to be represented in the memorial. Additional research could also conclude that the Nijmegen public does in fact desire these components to be represented after all. Another point of interest which was not discussed because of the limited scope of this study is the topic of mass culture and Americanization. The role of Americanization on the increasing memorial mania in Nijmegen or the Netherlands in general is particularly interesting to analyze. The question to be answered is whether Americanization is in fact the cause of the spreading of memorial mania. The global growing interest in public memory, unrelated to Americanization, could also be a cause for this.

Finally, it would be interesting to utilize the findings of this thesis in new contexts. They could for instance be applied to other parts of the Netherlands to see if the same factors are at play in the public displays of memory elsewhere. On top of that, other cultural traumas could be detected and possibly resolved as an addition to the current research. A logical continuation of this research would be to apply memory and trauma theories to areas which were affected by other ‘friendly’ bombings such as Enschede, Deventer, and Arnhem. However, the theories do not necessarily have to be applied to situations in the Second World War. Research into those areas can be interesting, because it could enhance collective identity in the affected regions. Collective identity has many positive effects, as it will make people feel more connected to each other and to their cultural heritage. All in all, the recommendations for further research do not rule out that this thesis is an interesting contribution to the current field of memory studies. The paradoxical actions of the United States Army in Nijmegen during the Second World War make the Oversteek bridge an especially interesting case study.

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## **Attachment 1: Interview with Anja Adriaans – 10 April 2015**

1. What role did you play in the production of the book ‘the Crossing’?

*The office building of the newspaper De Gelderlander was located next to the building site of the bridge. They came up with the idea to research the history of the spot. During their research they found out that there was a lot of interesting information and contact with relatives of the deceased soldiers and so they decided to try and make a book about it. Around that time I met with Rob Jaspers, a journalist at De Gelderlander who often writes about the history of Nijmegen and the Second World War. I already knew him, and he told me to meet up with Dorine Steenberg, because she could use some help. So then I met Dorine. In the beginning, I gave her a helping hand with basic tasks such as translating texts, researching things, and giving my Americanist view on some aspects. The latter happened more and more. My involvement in the project increased when it became clear that it would become a large project that included a trip to the United States. It took a lot of time to contact all the family members. I made documents about all the fallen soldiers and added more and more information to them. We knew the name, function, and burial place from each of the fallen soldiers. Using American sites, people from De Gelderlander located the family members. At some point, Dorine got help from an American lady who had access to many Internet sites that are used to ask questions, and locate things and people. This has been crucial in the locating process. In this way, we were able to locate family of about half of the fallen soldiers. For some of them we found a brother or sister, for others cousins who knew and wanted to keep the memory alive. It was then decided that these people would be interviewed and therefore we had to go to the United States to visit them. I assisted in contacting the relatives to make arrangements for a meeting and translating e-mails and texts. At that time, we also cooperated with the Liberation Museum at Groesbeek, with a kind of ‘knowledge group’ who checked things for us. They researched the meaning of all the military decorations for instance, and the meaning of the battalions, because no-one knew anything about that. So that was an entirely new and interesting connection. Then it was decided that a trip had to be made. We ended up taking two trips. I prepared many practical things, such as the route, and the addresses of the people we were going to visit. The first trip was mainly in the Eastern states. It was remarkable that almost all of the 48 or 49 fallen soldiers came either from the Midwest or the East of the United States. This is probably because of the training facilities – Fort Benning or Fort Bragg – I don’t know. We haven’t looked into that,*



*but it was remarkable that we had too many contacts in the Eastern states than we could handle for the first trip. You really have to focus when you are on a trip like this, because it goes in many different directions. Every story had beautiful sub-stories or interesting connections. The most important role I played, according to me, is that I – being an Americanist – was often able to place matters in a certain context of what I knew from the United States. For instance, I immediately recognized that every soldier came from a culture of immigration. Almost everyone had roots in Europe and was a second or third generation immigrant, almost always with the stories of poverty and misery that go hand in hand with that. Large families, poverty, unemployment, wandering, alcohol, no education, really the hard life. It was quite remarkable that almost all the stories were similar. No-one came from a settled middleclass environment. I don't want to suggest that these stories weren't there, because we were not able to locate all 48 soldiers, but it is an image that showed itself immediately. Becoming a paratrooper, which they all were, was made more attractive because you were paid double, it came with a certain status, and it provided the opportunity of an education and a future – if you survived – and insurance money for your family if you didn't, which the army provided. With this insurance money, families could often climb the social ladder. Many family members recognized this, and were very grateful. Someone said: 'It helped my mother to buy a piece of land and settle somewhere'. This gave me goosebumps when I heard it, and it still does. Because it is all still so close by. The chaos, and the utter poverty. In that time, all boys had to go into service, because there was a war in America, so they were drafting. So all boys knew that they would be drafted eventually, but the choice to become a paratrooper was a dangerous but free choice. Becoming a paratrooper was seen as more dangerous, because jumping from a plane was a new phenomenon back then. There were planes, but fighting in that manner and using and supplying your soldiers in that way was a new tactic. The leader of the 82nd Division, General Gavin, made his first jump in '41. So, he was a General in the army already, but still had to do the training for paratroopers. That's how new it was. We are used to so many things nowadays. There is a great story from Groesbeek that belongs to the photos of all the paratroopers landing near Groesbeek and 'Klein Amerika' where a child calls out to his mother: 'mommy, mommy, God is throwing people from heaven!'*

## 2. Can you explain the media attention for the Oversteek?

*If you look at the region – Nijmegen, Arnhem, Elst, Betuwe, Overbetuwe – so much has happened during the Second World War that it is sometimes called the Normandy of the*

*Netherlands. I don't think there has been much attention for the Oversteek. All the attention that the bridge has gotten was from the Gelderlander, who did a project about it and is therefore a stakeholder. To be honest, I had expected more attention both on a local and national level. The commemoration of 70 years Market Garden was given much attention from different sides however: the city, regional tourism, Liberation Route, the Dutch, Canadian and American army, ambassadors, the mayors from the towns around the liberation route of Market Garden. There was a very special commemoration in the Stevenschurch. Why? I think it fits the picture of the attention for oral history. So the shift from memory to history. The people who were present will soon be gone. I think there is an interest for the tourism branch as well, for instance the Liberation Route. I don't think there is anything wrong with that. I actually applaud that. The Liberation Route tries to map the history of the Second World War and tries to make it interesting for the younger generation, for students, but also for tourists. I personally find it important to learn from the lessons of history. You can still learn new things by looking at the past, and you can get a different look on society and its future development. I believe scientists still play an important part in this. They have to continue to research, and keep asking questions.*

3. Why are you personally interested in the Oversteek, or in the Second World War in general?

*That has been a growing process. It was surprising for me as well, because before I studied American Studies I would have said: 'stop talking about the Second World War, that was ages ago!' My interest in the project derives from two aspects. The first is that my identical twin sister lives in the United States. She married an American man and emigrated seventeen years ago. She has the American nationality as well by now. So, I feel a connection with the country of my other half. Because of that, I went there, and still go there often. That is also a reason why I chose American Studies, because I did that later in my life. I didn't graduate until 2010. The second aspect is that I moved to Nijmegen eight years ago – that is when the interest in the Second World War and this region started. This region utterly surprised me. We lived in Den Bosch before that, and I think I had only been to Nijmegen three times in my entire life. Den Bosch was called the greenest city of the Netherlands for instance, and I found that absurd when I found out that there is much more nature in the region around Nijmegen. One thing I thought was: this region cannot sell itself, why is that? Something else I noticed was that the people around here are very open and social. You easily find yourself in a conversation with a stranger. For some reason, I found my home here in Nijmegen, and felt*

*that I belonged here. We always used to go for walks on Saturday to train for the 'Vierdaagse' and to get to know Nijmegen and its surrounding. At some point, we ran into all these World War Two memories and as long as I have lived in Nijmegen, I have always seen that the American presence is very visible in this city. This is because of the American companies in the area, the history of the Dobbelman factory, the Marshall help, the bombing. So this is when my eyes were opened to the local history of Nijmegen. I then found my goal: to connect this city and my profession as Americanist. I just see so many connections. I have always been especially interested in transatlantic ties. So, the American influence in Nijmegen was very visible to me. During our walks in Groesbeek for instance, I was deeply touched that the landscape showed precisely what had happened during the Second World War. It is so logical when you see the landscape at the border with Germany, where so much fighting happened. That was a real shock to me. And it can still get to me. You can see how hard there was fought, because of the hills, where they could hide behind, and the forests... What did it have to be like in this region to have Germany so close by. People who used to be your neighbor are suddenly your enemy. How on earth did the people get back to becoming neighbors? A good friend of mine lives in 'Klein Amerika' and she sometimes used to call me to come over. Every time she rebuild her house or wanted to dig into the ground, the bomb squad had to come. They always find something. When they build or torn down a shed or something they found eight grenades. They really found that once! The Second World War just becomes so vivid all of a sudden because of things like that. And when De Gelderlander asked me to help them with their project on the Oversteek, my excitement for the subject started to grow even more.*

4. Why do you think it is relevant today to build monuments for something that happened as long ago as the Second World War?

*I think the media has played an important part in this. There were barely any newspapers right after the war and there was definitely no money to generate publicity. On top of that: everyone had a sad and shocking story, so people were not interested in that of others. I think people were more interested in rebuilding, and therefore wanted to look at the future. It has taken a long time for this region, and Nijmegen especially, to get its housing construction into action. As a result, families lived together, young people couldn't get married and lived with their parents. So it is easy to explain why there was no attention for commemoration in the first ten years after the War. People were surrounded by chaos and misery and were busy trying to get out of that situation. After that, in the 50s and 60s, you had the Cold War and the*

*focus was on other matters as well. Nowadays, we see that the changes that the world has underwent actually started during the reconstruction after the Second World War. The Marshall help was important for that as well.*

5. During your trips, did you feel that commemorating the Second World War was important in the U.S?

*People definitely find it important. We were received with open arms everywhere we went. It was inconceivable how much material people still had. They had saved pictures and letters and found them very valuable.*

6. Can you explain this?

*This is of course very interesting for Americanists: why do you feel the need to fight in another country? The answer is ideology. America also became part of the war, but apart from attacking Japan, they also felt the need to save Europe together with the other Allied Forces. I don't think the Netherlands would do the same! I think the Second World War is special because it was the final 'good' war, the last undisputed war. The Americans and Canadians were liberators, they were the 'greatest generation' and all, and the ones that stayed at home were very grateful to the veterans. All the wars after that have become disputed. The family members of the 48 fallen soldiers are genuinely proud of them and their family. During the Vietnam War, this changed drastically. You couldn't be openly proud of your family and people felt shame.*

7. Do you think the fact that the Second World War was the last undisputed war strengthens the feelings of gratefulness and pride towards the veterans?

*Yes, I think so. Actually, the Second World War was very simple for the home front. The way in which the war was fought, and the soldiers died were all uncomplicatedly cruel. That changed in Vietnam. Those soldiers came back deeply traumatized. The Second World War veterans also came back traumatized, but PTSD was not an issue back then. Theoretically, it didn't exist. That makes the image of that part in history – conquering Hitler, and saving Europe – much more uncomplicated. It is easier to tell than what the soldiers were doing in other countries such as Vietnam. I'm not saying that the Second World War veterans aren't heroes, because they are. James Gavin is my personal hero. But it was different.*

## Attachment 2: Interview with Dorine Steenbergen – 22 April 2015

1. Are you familiar with the bombing of Nijmegen, and do you think it has been ignored?

*Yes, it is true that the bombing wasn't discussed the first decades after the war. Especially the Americans as the bombers. It was so embarrassing to face the fact that your friends had bombed you. It was simply impossible for people to face that. So it took a long time for people to talk about it. If I think about my own experience, I moved to Nijmegen in the early seventies. It wasn't until I started working at the newspaper in the eighties that the Americans were pronounced as the bombers of the city. And today, it's not a secret anymore. It is fully faced, and even being nuanced. At first it was called a mistake, but even that view is corrected. Today, we acknowledge that they had to get rid of their bombs, they weren't able to return with the bombs because of the heavy weight. And at the same time, those Americans were our liberators, there were only a couple of months between the bombing and the crossing. So, that is very paradoxical.*

2. What role did you play in the production of the book *The Crossing*

*My job was to find any next of kin of the boys that died here at the crossing, to locate them in the United States, and to tell them about the bridge as a monument and the light project, and to make appointments to meet them, let them tell about their memories about those boys. The most important question I wanted to answer was if anybody was thinking about the boys at all. Are they being mourned? On all fronts, that question could be answered with a big yes. And after those interviews I had to write down their stories.*

3. Why did *De Gelderlander* think it was important to publish a book about the background of the crossing?

*We moved to this building in 2011, and a few months after we were here, the building of the bridge started right in our backyard. The name 'De Oversteek' was set from the beginning, because the bridge would be named after the military operation since it would be located at almost the same spot where that operation took place. When the local authorities came with the idea to turn the bridge into a memorial with 48 pairs of streetlights, we were sure we had to do something with it. So first of all, we were looking at the building site from our office, and second of all, it is going to be a monument. We felt that we had to give the streetlights a face and write a portrait on the fallen soldiers. So that is how it happened. It was a race*

*against time, it all had to be done within a year. I started my research in December 2012, and the opening of the bridge was on November 23, 2013, and the book had to be finished by then. I started out with nothing, except for the names of the fallen soldiers. But I had no idea where to start in order to locate their family members.*

3. How did you end up locating the family members?

*I started out by googling the names. You have no idea how much you can find on the Internet. I received help from a man who adopted many American war graves at Margraten. He had many contacts in the United States, and helped me get in touch with an older lady in her seventies who was very good at tracking things. I have never met her in person, we only communicated via email. She had access to all sort of archives you can imagine, and tracked many family members for me without any self-interest. Without her, the book would not have been possible. In the end, the Mormon Genealogical Archive was very helpful in finding a lot of next of kin. And after I found all those relatives, I had to contact them and ask them if they would allow me to visit and interview them.*

4. How did people react to that question?

*Each and every one of them reacted full of enthusiasm. There wasn't a single one that showed any disinterest in the project. That was remarkable to me, because we are talking about something that happened seventy years ago.*

5. Had most of the relatives known the soldiers personally?

*No, not even that. If you think about it, those boys were about twenty years old, if you add seventy years to that, then you have a ninety year old person. So if the boys came from a family with brothers and sisters of about the same age, those siblings are eighty or ninety by now. There weren't many of them left. I had contact with a brother or sister once or twice, and those were very old people by now. Mostly, I have had contact with cousins that never met their uncle, but only knew the stories from hearsay.*

6. Did the relatives know their family member had died during the crossing in Nijmegen?

*No, most of them didn't know that. They knew their uncle or brother had died in the 'European Theater' as they called it. They didn't know the difference between the European countries that well either. They knew their relative had died in a liberation action, but thought*

*it had been in France or Belgium. I was the one who had to tell them it had been in the Netherlands, in Nijmegen on this and that day. That was a very unusual situation.*

7. Were the soldiers seen as heroes by their families?

*Yes, well, the families were proud of them. They had died for the liberation of Europe, and everyone was fully alive to realize that. The word 'heroes' was mentioned every now and then. They must have been very brave, the way the crossing went. You are going to the other side of the river, and you are literally a target for the Germans. It was very brave what those boys did.*

8. Do you think there is enough attention for the Oversteek bridge?

*Yes, very much so. I think there is a lot of attention for the bridge. Especially when you take the Sunset March into consideration, which takes place every night. Last year with the commemoration of 70 years Market Garden we had an entire Sunday afternoon of television broadcast about the crossing. They included me in it as well for a short interview. I think on a national level, there has been much attention as well.*

9. Anja Adriaans told me she had expected there to be more attention for the bridge, and thought all the attention it received from the media was because of *De Gelderlander*.

*It's true that De Gelderlander is the one that puts the most attention on the bridge. When the book had just appeared for instance, a meeting with the Editors-in-Chief of almost all Dutch newspapers took place in Nijmegen. My boss, the Editor-in-Chief of De Gelderlander, proudly presented the book to everyone, and even gave it to them as a gift, hoping a story would evolve out of that of course. It is true that none of the newspapers wrote a story about the crossing after that.*

10. Why do you think it is important to emphasize the personal stories behind the fallen soldiers?

*I think personal stories are much more telling than military stories about who did which action, who came up with it, and what the result was in the end. I believe that the ordinary, human stories tell more about a dramatic event than a pompous military analysis. The ordinary human story is much more touching. It is easier for people to identify with, because you can think: 'That could have been my brother'.*

11. Why are you interested in the crossing, or the Second World War in general?

*I am actually much more interested in the First World War. When we started to come up with the idea to do something with the bridge, we had to choose a person to take the lead. I simply got the assignment to be frank. I was honored to get the assignment of course, but I did not insist on being part of the project or anything like that. I got the assignment because I am good at human interest stories, and that is the reason they cleared me for a year to take on the project.*

12. What do you usually do at the newspaper?

*I did anything you can imagine at this newspaper: local news, health care, crime. The last three or four years I have been working at the specials editorial office, where we produce specials for the newspaper that appear once a week, for instance a special on cultural activities.*

13. Have you worked on a large project comparable to *De Oversteek* before?

*No, never. It was the icing on the cake that is my career. It was very special. I worked together with Anja Adriaans and a female photographer, so we went to the United States with three women. That made it very interesting as well, because you would expect men with a subject about a war. I noticed that the relatives found it striking as well that they were visited by three women to talk about the Second World War.*

14. Personal stories might be associated more with women though.

*Yes that is true. I have to say, the military stories in the book were written by others, by men. You have to explain the military operation, but I did not have time for that. I focused on the human portraits of those boys, and nothing else.*

15. How long did the project take?

*I started looking for family members in December 2012, and got in touch with the first family around Christmas already. So that went pretty quickly. When I had collected some contacts who lived in the same region, we went to the United States for the first time, in early April 2013. We went for a second time in August. For a year, I did not have any holidays or days off, I was working on the project every day and every weekend. It really was a race against time. At the same time, I knew that I would be held responsible if I failed, so I had everyone breathing in my neck while I was working on it. Luckily, many people at De Gelderlander*



*helped me, and Anja as well of course, and many other people. I mentioned all of them in the book.*

16. Why do you think it is relevant today to build monuments for something that happened as long ago as the Second World War?

*I am of course a journalist, so I register and look at things. This question is more appropriate for the builder of the monument. But in general, I think that remembering has been alive and kicking again for the last ten or fifteen year. Look at the crowds that come to the commemoration ceremonies on May 4 and 5. You have to see a monument such as 'De Oversteek' against that background.*

17. Is there anything else you would like to add?

*Something else that is important to say about the reactions of the Americans is that you have to place it in the background of the Last Good War. A war in which everybody, left and right, agreed that the Nazi Army had to be beaten. After that, the United States has only been involved in wars that do not feel as good, such as Vietnam, Korea, and present day wars. You can ask yourself if a book such as The Crossing could ever be written about present day soldiers that are killed in a military action. You would receive so much critique: 'what are you guys doing there anyway,' and 'just stay away from there.' But the Second World War really was the last war where everyone was on the same page. 'We need help, and this has to be fought out, and there can only be one victor.' That was the kick for the Americans of course. In the past years, the United States has received a lot of criticism about military intrusiveness, but the intrusiveness during the Second World War is never questioned. Thanks to the Americans, we won the war. I would have loved to shed light on the other side of the story. Because the German Army also consisted of young boys who simply did what they were told. They also believed they were fighting for a good cause. I would love to do a small project similar to the crossing, but with families of German fallen soldiers. Unfortunately, there is no money or time for that.*

18. Have you heard anything from the relatives since the opening of the bridge?

*Yes, every once in a while I receive a Facebook message saying the book has made it to the library of their city. I received such a message a few weeks ago. That is very nice to see. And people are lending out the book all the time. So, it is very much alive over there. One of the family members is giving lectures about the book. I really like that, and I am honored that I*

*was able to do this. I cannot believe what the book has caused. I think the way in which the family members deal with memories of their deceased relatives is incredible. I could not be bothered with the story of an uncle who died in a war in a country I don't even know. People in the United States are much more aware of their family and ancestry.*

### **Attachment 3: Interview with Tim Ruijling – 19 May 2015**

For the interview with Tim Ruijling, I handed him my list of questions, which he incorporated in his story about the Sunset March, because he preferred to talk about the Sunset March without being interrupted. Therefore, I will first list the questions, and then the uninterrupted information he told.

1. How did you come up with the idea of the Sunset March?
2. Why is it important to you to commemorate the Waal crossing (which happened such a long time ago)
3. Did you get much support for the Sunset March, or was it hard to realize the project?
4. Why do the veterans volunteer to join the march?
5. Can you tell something about your experience of the Sunset March?
6. When I walked the Sunset March, I heard about special coins which you received from the American Army. Can you tell me some more about these coins?
8. Have you ever gotten reactions from the United States besides the coins? Why do you think they find the Sunset March interesting or important?
7. How often do 'regular' people join the Sunset March, and how do they react to the experience? What motivates them to come along?

*One day, I read in the newspaper that a new bridge had been opened in Nijmegen with a light monument on it. The article read that there were 48 pairs of lights which switched on two by two every night to commemorate 48 fallen soldiers from the 82nd American Airborne Division. It said the lights were turned on with the speed of a slow pace. I did not understand this, because in the military, a slow pace is only used at burial ceremonies. So one night, I drove to the bridge, and luckily arrived at the exact location where the first streetlight was turned on. So I started walking along with the lights. I soon found out that 'slow pace' was the wrong description, because it was the tempo of a 'slow march'. Eventually, I figured out that the speed to walk along with the lights as they turn on is approximately 5 km/h. When I was walking there, looking at the cars rushing by, I thought: how can this monument be turned into something that is more alive? At the moment, the drivers of the cars might think that half of the streetlights on the bridge are broken. I immediately came up with the idea to let a veteran walk along with the lights every night. I am a veteran myself, and a member of*

*the veterans society of Overbetuwe, and I know that any veteran will walk along in a dignified and respectful manner, because of what they have experienced as a member of the military. So, a while after that first night I was at a veteran society meeting, and I discussed my plan with four other veterans. And while I was telling my story, I saw the four of them nodding and thinking: we are going to do that. And then I said: well, we can do it, and I want to, and we should, but we can only do it if we have a Website where veterans can sign-up to do the march. Because the five of us cannot do it alone. It should be open to all veterans. And that is how it happened. It took us three weeks, because it was all hobby, and we had to do it at night, because the one who build the Website still has a day job. So we managed to arrange everything in three weeks. And then we tested the Website on a Sunday afternoon. We went live, tried it out one by one, tried it again, and concluded at one point that the Website was functioning properly. So then one of the four guys send me an e-mail which stated that he was going to march that night. That was the beginning of the Sunset March, October 19, 2014. After he had marched that first time, we could not stop. We had to go on. Why do I think it is important to remember an event such as the crossing? Well, first of all it is a beautiful light monument on a beautiful bridge, and it is kind of dead. As I said: a car drives by, only half of the lights is turned on, and the driver rushes by thinking that the rest of the lights are broken. That is not how the monument is supposed to work. But more importantly, during the crossing by the Allied Forces, the 82<sup>nd</sup> American Airborne Division fought for the freedom of our county. They gave their lives for that. They paid the highest prize for us. And when you think about it, they are the ones who have secured a life in peace and freedom for us where we can talk about certain subjects such as a bridge which commemorates the people who died there. We can do certain things the way we want to do them, because they gave their life for us. That is a short summary of the essence. But it sure is important to remember and commemorate. And that can be done by letting a veteran walk along with the lights every night. I explained before why I immediately thought about veterans for the job. A veteran is a person who has been to a warzone or has worked on peace missions, and has experienced certain things. And veterans are by definition military men or women. And military can execute these kinds of events dignified and with respect. They automatically have a feeling towards such a remembrance, connected to their mission where they experienced intense matters. You see the same thing on National Veterans day, and on May 4<sup>th</sup>, National Commemoration Day of the dead, on the Dam in Amsterdam. You see all the veterans dignified and respectful. I know for a fact that the people who participate in the Sunset March will act in a dignified and respectful way as well. We could possibly extend it to ex-military, but that is it. But for now,*

*we will continue with veterans only, because they can endorse it with their own experience. What they have been through. When we started the Sunset March on October 19, 2014, we took a leap of faith, we did not know how it was going to go. We had a Website, and that was it. We had the great advantage that the premiere of the film Lights Crossing was scheduled the first Friday after we started walking. This was a project commissioned by the city council. At that premiere, we met almost everyone who had anything to do with the bridge or the monument. The architects, the artist, the people from the city council, the photographer, Anja Adriaans from the Radboud University. All the people who were involved in the Lights Crossing project. All the positive reactions we received there were a real boost for us. Everyone thought it was great that we did the Sunset March, and they thought it was a great and valuable idea. That really helped us continue with the march, because it was very hard in the beginning. It was just the five of us, so each of us had to march once a week, sometimes even twice a week. And slowly but surely we started to receive sign-ups, and luckily the group of veterans grew immensely in the Netherlands. But we have worked very hard for our idea at least the first six months. On each day that no veteran had signed up, one of our group, which has been extended to nine or ten people now, had to do the march. This week is the first week that we are able to fill up with veterans who signed up on the Website. More and more veterans sign up due to the publicity we get, but also because of the support and the positive reactions. It is nowhere near where it should be though. We would like to have two or three people for every night, but that is not going to happen. We simply want the schedule to be filled. We only have two rules. Everyone can do it anyway they want, but we have two rules: be dignified and respectful. Something that we had not thought about before we started was the 'regular' people who walk along, who we call the followers. We simply thought: one veteran every night, dignified and respectful, that would be great. But what we see now is sometimes a large group of people who joins us to walk the Sunset March. They just come to the bridge, walk along with us, ask questions. At the end of the Sunset March, the veteran or veterans usually walk down to salute the old monument. Almost every night, we have some followers. In early December we had an exceptional group of about thirty people. It was a veteran who had arranged all that, and had come with family and friends and such. And in April we had Americans from a Battlefield Tour who came along. It was a total coincidence that we figured out they were at the monument. Forty American military men from the South of Germany, they had never heard of the Sunset March. So they walked along that night. That was a very impressive march. Every night is different. You walk in the wind, rain, cold, every possible weather condition can be encountered, you see beautiful sunsets, but you often walk*

alone. And it is great when you walk often, because the meaning and importance of the Sunset March hits you harder. The more often you walk, the more you realize why you are walking there. Because you do realize it. And when you are walking there with forty American soldiers in silence, that is something. They did not say a word, they only experienced. Very little people realize the Waal crossing is one of the most heroic actions in the Second World War. Especially heroic for the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne. All of them know Nijmegen and the Waal river nowadays. They all know the story of the crossing. I found that out when I was working with them in Egypt for a while. We receive many reactions, and all of them are positive, and slowly, we are starting to receive reactions from the United States. A very surreal and special thing was that I received a call in April from Francis Keefe, who survived the crossing. He was in those little boats on September 20, 1944. He crossed the river. He was present at the opening of the bridge as well. He is very old now, but he called me at home to tell me how wonderful everyone in the United States finds the Sunset March. They really appreciate it. The initiative, and the execution. We often receive reactions from the United States. Last week I got an e-mail that read: "I choked up when I heard about the initiative." Those are very special moments, and also encouragements to ourselves. Apart from the phone calls and e-mails, we also received an encouragement in real life. The American Army knows the system of the coin for excellence. It is a very simple system for a commanding officer, usually a colonel or general, a commanding officer of a unit, to show his appreciation to someone without lots of paperwork, difficult routes, and application. All the guys in our Sunset March group received a coin of excellence from a commanding officer of the 504<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment, which is the regiment which actually crossed the river in 1944. Well, that is a great sign of appreciation. You do not simply get one of those coins, they are rather special, for special occasions only. I find it exceptional in the Netherlands that we have solely received positive reactions to the march. I think that is very special, because people often feel the need to downgrade things or look at them from a different perspective. So far, everything has been positive though. Everyone wants to cooperate, and the followers often applaud the idea as well. And many people say that they will come back. There is one man who walks along every Thursday, that is very special. Especially in the Netherlands. That stimulates us to continue walking, because it was very hard in the beginning to make sure there is someone to march every night. It only takes time though, it is not hard as an experience. Many people are from Nijmegen, but we also see people who are visiting Nijmegen, or join family, or heard about the initiative and come along if they are ever in the city. You have to wait for all seasons to see if an initiative such as this works and what the consequences are. You have had

*to experience all four seasons, because we are almost entering the vacation period. It is very possible that people heard about us and think: now that I am on a camping ground near Nijmegen, I will take my bike and ride to that bridge that I heard about. We also have the 'Vierdaagse' coming up. And the 20<sup>th</sup> of September, which is the date of the crossing. We are trying to expand the events for the 'Vierdaagse.' We want four different nationalities on the bridge for four nights. We want the British, Americans, Canadians, and Polish, which are the nations that liberated us in 1944. That is what we want to do, but we are not sure yet. We are discussing it with the organizers of the 'Vierdaagse.' That makes it very special. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of May, National Liberation Day, we took the freedom fire over the bridge. Two things are important to remember from what I have told so far. First of all: how do we experience it and second: why do we do it? We do it because we can keep the memory of those 48 soldiers alive, but we also do it to show our appreciation for all Allied Forces who died or fought to make sure we could live in peace and freedom. Second, we see many veterans who process their own experiences, their own job as military which has brought them their status as a veteran. They all experienced intense matters, which comes back to them at the Sunset March. They can work through it, which makes it very special.*