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Titaniumstraat 11, NL-6031 TV Nederweert, The Netherlands

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**BAIV is realizing dreams. Today we supported the request of Mark and Sandra Cobain to make it possible for their father to finally visit his own father's grave in Nederweert.**

## Dennis did not know who his father was until a year ago, but search leads the Northern Irishman to his war grave in Nederweert

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*Dennis Cobain and his son Mark at Cyril Percy's grave. In the background, wife and daughter-in-law watch. Image: Jeroen Kuit*



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Relatively much is known about the British soldier Cyril Percy. Although his only son Dennis knew nothing about him until a year ago. In Nederweert, the relatives of Percy, almost 78 years after his death, were told his story on Thursday.

*Overwhelmed*, dazed is Dennis Cobain (79). He has just been told the story of the man responsible for his existence, but whom he never knew. Londoner Cyril Francis Fuller Percy was in his early twenties when World War II broke out. He fought in 1942 at one of the turning points of the war, the famous tank battle in the Egyptian desert at El Alamein. On his return to the UK, he was sent to Northern Ireland for training. There he met a girl, but they did not marry. Whether he ever knew that a child was conceived during that short-lived relationship, Dennis in other words, can no longer be ascertained.

### Frontline



It is known that Percy married another woman at the end of 1943 and not much later left for France, where the Allies had started their decisive offensive against Nazi Germany. It brought Percy as a member



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of the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion of the Middlesex Regiment to De Peel where there was heavy fighting in October 1944.



Gunners from the 1st Battalion Middlesex Regiment fire their Vickers machine gun at Liessel. The photo was taken on November 1, 1944. *Photo: Imperial War Museum*



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The front line lay between the villages of Asten and Liessel, where brigades of the 15<sup>th</sup> Scottish Infantry Division were supplemented by the machine gunners of the Middlesex Regiment. During the fighting, Percy's position was hit by a shell fired by a German tank from the hamlet of Sloot south of Liessel. Lance Sergeant Cyril Percy was killed, according to the Regiment's war diary

Baby Dennis, born in 1943, ended up in a foster family shortly after the war. A widow who already had nine children of her own took care of the boy who had been put up for adoption by his mother. Cobain has never been able to figure out why she did that. "Perhaps out of shame, an unmarried woman with child in Northern Ireland at the time. That was impossible. What I do find strange is that she had seven more children after me. However, she never told me about it."

### DNA

Cobain has always known that his adoptive mother was not his real mother. His real parents were not talked about, not even about the war. He grew up, married May and had children of his own. Still, he felt something was missing. More than a year ago, he started an internet search, where nowadays online DNA databases make it easy to trace lost and unknown relatives. It introduced Cobain to his father's siblings and a nephew in the US state of Utah. Slowly but surely a history unknown to Cobain unfolded.

Now that his father's name was known, it turned out not to be that difficult to trace his final resting place. He is buried in the Commonwealth War Cemetery in Nederweert, as accurately recorded by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Fortunately, amateur historians such as Niek Hendrix and Ferry Scheepers live in and around Nederweert, who after some research can trace the story of Cyril Percy in reasonable detail. "I grew up with the stories of my grandmother from Asten," says Scheepers. He found photos of Percy's regiment and even thinks he knows the place where

he died in the Dennendijkse Bossen. "Many clues come together in this story. I'm glad we can get this across."



Dennis Cobain (left) is presented with the crest of the 1st Battalion, Middlesex Regiment, by amateur historian Niek Hendrix. *Photo: Ivo Rigter*

### Tears

At Percy's grave, Dennis Cobain gets a little upset. His son Mark and daughter-in-law Sandra are also fighting back tears. "I didn't think it would affect me so much," says Mark at the white stone in memory of his grandfather. "Beautiful and honourable that you Dutch are making such an effort in memory of the soldiers." His father has to swallow. "He was 24 when he died. I now have grandchildren that age. That realization has to sink in for a while. Yes, that makes me emotional."