

## REMEMBRANCE CEREMONY MARCH 2005

In addition to the seven men from the USS ERIE, twenty other US servicemen lost their lives during WW II in the Netherlands Antilles (in the area of the islands of Aruba, Curacao and Bonaire).

These servicemen were memorialized May 30, 1959, with the placement (just outside the American Consulate General in Willemstad) of a large rock to which is affixed a plaque reading:

IN MEMORY OF THE MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES  
ARMED FORCES WHO DIED IN THE NETHERLANDS  
ANTILLES DURING WORLD WAR II



In 2005, one of the ERIE's Radiomen (and former Musician), Donald Leetch, returned to Curacao at the invitation of Dimitri Cloose (then, Director of the Curacao Maritime Museum), Jack Shellekens (a CMM volunteer and editor of the Museum's newsletter) Joop Kooijman (editor of the periodical *Antillean Navigator*) and Rudy Duvale (a U.S. WW II veteran).

Donald, his wife, Maxine, his daughter, Barbara, and son-in-law, Warren visited Curacao aboard the cruise ship ROTTERDAM, arriving the morning of March 10, 2005. After a pier-side welcome, Don and family were taken to a number of sites: Piscadera Bay where the ERIE was beached on a sandbar shortly after it was torpedoed, what remains of the U.S. Army Camp Suffisant (where Don and other crewmembers bunked after the incident), a cemetery where twenty US servicemen were temporarily interred during WW II, and a street named for the ERIE, "Erieweg" (in the Zeelandia commercial district).

This was followed by a commemorative ceremony at the WW II memorial in the garden at the American Consulate General. There the Leetch family and their hosts were joined by the U.S. Consul-general, Robert Sorenson, the Director of the Foreign Relations Directorate, Dito Mendes de Gouveia, the Chief of Staff for the Commander of Naval Forces, Jaap Bijsterbos, the U.S. Vice Consul, Jean Akers, and representatives of the American Army, the US Coast Guard and the Forward Operating Base.

Consul Sorenson welcomed the guests and commented on the reason for the memorial ceremony. Donald Leetch then laid a ceremonial wreath in memory of the seven men lost aboard the ERIE 62 years earlier and made a few poignant remarks. The photos below show Mr.

Sorenson and Donald Leetch addressing the guests, and Donald laying a wreath at the WW II memorial.



After the ceremony, Mr. and Mrs. Sorenson graciously invited everyone present to their home for light refreshments and conversation. There Don received postal covers stamped aboard the ERIE and a set of radio headphones recovered by divers searching the seabed around the area where the ERIE was beached on November 12, 1942.

The remainder of the day was spent lunching at Fort Nassau and visiting the Curacao Maritime Museum, where a number of ERIE artifacts (recovered from Piscadera Bay) are on display.