

Wijnand Langeraar, Rear-Admiral RNLN(ret.)

On 16 February this year Wijnand Langeraar and his wife Ad lost their lives in a car accident. At the cremation ceremony in Eindhoven on 22 February, in the presence of their family, many friends and relations, five former Dutch Hydrographers and representatives from the Commander in Chief of the Royal Netherlands Navy and The Netherlands Hydrographer, Jan Kreffer, Rear-Admiral RNLN(ret.), looked back on the turbulent life of the man who, during the sixties played a most prominent role in the hydrographic and oceanographic community.

In 1936, after three years of education at the Royal Naval College in Den Helder, Wijnand served as a young lieutenant in the former Netherlands East Indies on board HNIMS Willebrord Snellius, under the command of T.K. van Asbeck, Lt Cdr. RNLN. There his fascination for hydrography began.

Returning to The Netherlands he was soon confronted with the Second World War



Rear Admiral Wijnand Langeraar RNIN (ret.) (Source: Collectie Instituut voor Maritieme Historie, Koninklijke Marine, 's-Gravenhage)

and the occupation of his country. He made two attempts to escape across the North Sea, both of which failed and he was imprisoned by the Nazi's and sentenced to death as a common prisoner. The loss of the official documents postponed the execution and he was freed in 1945. Rumours say that a member of the court, being a German Naval officer, contributed to the disappearance of the documents as a sign of respect for Wijnands attitude.

After World War II, under T.K. van Asbeck, Captain RNLN, he took part in the rebuilding of The Netherlands Hydrographic Service, meanwhile completing his studies at Delft University with a degree in Geodesy. In 1954 he was in command of HNIMS Snellius, the pride of the Hydrographic Service in Netherlands New Guinea. There he used his geodetic skill in several elaborate triangulations and astronomic observations. However Wijnand was not only quick witted, he was also a good organiser, he was also talented in many other ways. On Sunday mornings on board Snellius he used to lead the divine service and at the request of the local people of Merauke he switched from the ship's upper deck to the little local church.

In 1961 he succeeded Van Asbeck, Rear-Admiral, as Hydrographer. From then on there was never a dull moment. The Small Craft Chart was produced and became a best-seller. The Officers' scientific training was improved and Wijnand either initiated or at least took active part in every group which worked on co-operation in Hydrography.

In 1962 the North Sea Hydrographic Commission (NSHC) was established on his initiative as the first regional commission under the International Hydrographic Bureau.

Since 1957 the Bureau had been working on a Convention to provide an Intergovernmental Legal Organisation but with little success: many proposals were put forward but they never received general agreement.

Soon thereafter Rear-Admiral A.B. Irving, the UK Hydrographer and Wijnand broke through this deadlock by submitting a new proposal to be dealt with at the 9th IH Conference. Rear-Admiral S. Ritchie, took over from Irving and continued the British support. At the 9th International Hydrographic Conference in 1967, which was chaired by Admiral Langeraar, the Convention was accepted.

The Hydrographic world had become too limited for Wijnand and his enormous energy was directed towards oceanography, which resulted in his Chairmanship of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission for UNESCO in Paris. Meanwhile he was building a private house on the French island of Houat, off the southern shores of Brittany, assisted by family and friends during their holidays.

After his retirement from the Navy his way of life continued as before: Maritime Institute, Eurocean, Advisory Boards and a Professorship. A man like this must have been supported by a very special wife. Such a person was Fieke whom he married in 1946. After her death Wijnand married Ad and they too became a very happy couple. May the memory of this remarkable life be comfort for their family.

Source: Jan C. Kreffer, Rear-Admiral RNLN(ret.)