

Hello FreeWalkers, On March 30th I was privileged to complete my fourth Holland 50 Mile Kennedy March. Five such walks in different locations qualify one to be a Master Kennedy Walker. Representing FreeWalkers, but flying alone, I had hoped to take a free military space available flight from either Andrews Air Force Base or Baltimore -Washington International. Last minute commitments ruled out that and I departed DC, 27 March, on a commercial flight bound for Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport. After a short a stay in Philly Airport's USO, I boarded, scrunched my just small enough sideways carry-on bag into the overhead and found my economy aisle seat. I was comfortable enough to stretch out and sleep most of the trip. I might have slept more though, minus headphones, I periodically found myself occasionally staring at a thankfully, far-away movie monitor where Daniel Craig's foreboding furrowed forehead, a wearily engrossed James Bond, was on display.

Upon arrival, I shuttled to and fro, searching between the flight's assigned baggage carousel to the oversized-bags side location. Eventually I learned that the Roosevelt Log, Big Stick, checked-in as my one free bag, was still in Philly. The airline promised to deliver it to my Holland destination in time to present it to my host, the next day. I stretched my legs, wandering about Schiphol Airport that Thursday afternoon: People watching, coffee and a real croissant', perusing bookstore choices of novels in English, once-again mentally noting a former tasking, the Economist.

Eventually I hopped on the hotel shuttle and travelled a few km's to a surprisingly subdued, pond ensconced biz' park area. Excellent food, a more than valid 3.5 stars, quite reasonably costing a little less than the comparable U.S traveler familiar chains competing locally. Though I gathered that the world famous Kuekenhof was abloom with tulips and other spring beauty, I resisted and spent the night largely resting up, conserving walking energy. 'Still minus reading material, I surfed the free TV's English, German, Italian and Dutch programming. Just as I sample European culture when marching, foreign language TV can provide both subtle and overt non-verbal cues and clues. Though I am no linguist, I spent 11 years in nearby Germany and a combined 6 months in 20-plus walk trips in Holland: Bicycle-touring to and fro some.

After shuttling back to the airport the next morning I had a pleasurable two-hour train ride to my march destination, Sittard. I walked to the Sporthalle where I was to stay and start next morning and met my kind host, Ad Van Der Loo. He had arranged for me to stay that night in the Sporthalle and provided my registration, which included all the food and water I needed en route on the march. So, aside from incidentals and a few beers, my Sittard Kennedy March experience itself was free. In the canteen that night, I was interviewed at-length for a Dutch magazine and I watched a TV program centering on the march. Originators of the march who had greeted me, like Ad and others I had just met that afternoon were interviewed on-screen.

At morning's mars (march) 4:30 am start ceremony I briefly addressed approximately 3,000 people; most anxious walkers (wandelaars) ready to get going. They honored most of the 11 original 1963 Sittard marchers, including Ad, who presided over the ceremony. I've undoubtedly walked other walks with most of them and some of them several or many walks. So, they are not strangers. We have spent considerable time together. One of the songs most often referenced is "You Never Walk Alone." Most Nederlanders speak English, yet without words, each rhythmic step, we walk the same walk, we talk the same talk, we walk-talk. I'm absorbed

and one with the crowd, yet the individual with my meditative thoughts, unencumbered with multi-tasking a stress *FreeWalker*. So, there I stood, elated and enthused, in the balcony of the Sittard, Holland sport hall for, to my knowledge, the world's only continuously held Kennedy Walk: the 50<sup>th</sup> and "Jubilee Mars (March)." I told my fellow wandelaars that I was honored to attend my second Sittard, Holland Kennedy Mars (March), 25 years later, and thanked its founding walker and Kennedy Mars Administrator, Ad Van Der Loo, just as gracious a host as he was in his so genuinely friendly e-mails.

I invited the Sittard wandelaars to attend our Freewalkers-DC , 22-23 November and 9 Feb. Kennedy Walks. Later, Ad assured me that we have some Dutch commitment to attend our next annual February walk. Although I had spent considerable time preparing, I kept focus on the sentence that immediately following JFK's, perhaps, most famous words:

"And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country. ***My fellow citizens of the world, ask not what America will do for you, but what, together, we can do for the freedom of man.*** "

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2007/apr/22/greatspeeches>

The ceremony soon completed and the starter's gun was fired. Marchers began streaming outdoors and down the road. I started a little late, around 5:15, but it appears, despite plantar fasciitis, I might have done well had I entered in the non-race walking, competitive marching class. However, I have long seen walking as a competition with the elements and myself only. I also like to do what I can to encourage other walkers, especially those without someone near, perhaps waddling along in obvious pain. Those are the folks that appreciate even a few words of encouragement: acceptance

Though it had been around 40 degrees plus, Fahrenheit, the day before, it was an atypical 0 degrees Celsius at the march's start, 32 Fahrenheit with a very significant wind chill. A day approaching the rigors of our 9 February C&O Canal Kennedy Walk, as Ad pointed out.

However, in Europe there is normally that ongoing, flowing, rarely broken, chain of walkers to *swim* along with: A multi-colored streaming village swimming along through fields and streets, roads. There is ever a diversion available. "You never walk alone." A few called out to me: "Hey, you're the American." I had a tiny U.S. flag perched atop my backpack. I often give them out as souvenirs to kids. Sometimes a reward for the food or drink they provide free. Early on, I saw a much larger U.S. flag flowing from a gargantuan-sized pack bobbing along next to a very tall European soldier. Eventually, I sidled up to the flag's owner, much shorter than her European walk partner, and interrupted their conversation. She, a young U.S. soldier in camouflage, was capably strolling along. Though there seemed a subtle hitch in her ambling gait, she had that committed and determined look. I inquired and she retorted that she was from "Cali," California, and stationed not that far from Sittard, in Germany. She was immersed, swimming along, a welcome diversion for those around her and for the villagers she walked by, offering us sweets, food and drinks. Perhaps, some still recalled how Americans were their liberators in WWII?

The march registration covered more than enough food to sustain us while marching and

after: Dutch cheese sandwiches, others with meat added, boiled eggs, fruits, veggies, drinks and water was handed to you just after you got each of your start card's unannounced five checkpoints punched. This is a common marching measure to ensure folks weren't skipping segments or running, which is prohibited.

I arrived at finish, back at the sporthalle, in surprisingly good time, 14 hours later and just before sundown. Somehow there often isn't a strong sense of time when I walk these marches. They seem to be like one continuous walk, one continuous trail, stretched-out, end-to-end, each time and wherever I walk, reconnecting, not wanting it to end. I'm just streaming, swimming, often wordlessly, *walk-talking*, along. Occasionally, and most briefly, stopping only for necessities, including sock changes and to grab the occasional cafe' coffee or bowl of tomato soup minus the accompanying tiny meatballs.

Amid the celebratory marching music and carnival, marathon - like atmosphere, Ad bought me a beer though he was busy officiating the finish. *Ad*-ministering, so to speak. He sat me down behind the several computers where folks were getting their march recorded, some also linked to the various international marching organizations for cumulative recognition and status. I joined others and bought another *bier* and some mayonnaise and onion *frites*: French Fries. Though it was not aired, I was interviewed for regional TV and managed to surprise Ad by getting him on camera and presenting him with the late arrival, Roosevelt Log (a walking stick). I carried it on our 9 February FreeWalkers' Kennedy Walk – DC. It symbolizes and conveys how the Kennedy Walk – the Kennedy March – the Kennedy Challenge returned to its original international full-circle focus, so to speak.

Yes, the Kennedy 50-Mile Walk and its attendant message of hope for a better world can inspire a healthful surpassing of both physical and cognitive thresholds thought to be insurmountable. The experience can also inspire one to transfer the resultant energy into avenues of individual and collective universal, spiritual growth due to the Kennedy legacy.

Amid a very jubilant crowd with a marching band that would play well into the night, the Kennedy legacy's "can – do" spirit was thriving in Sittard's sporthalle. Walkers, no matter what their times, were greeted like heroes and most were presented with flowers, a tradition that goes back to Holland's Roman occupation and gladiator victories.

Paul and I want President Obama to issue a third presidential 50-mile walk challenge. Can we get him and or the First Lady to walk 50 miles? Mrs. Obama certainly is emphasizing and championing physical fitness, if not violence control measures. The Kennedy Legacy and its historical impact remain. The Kennedy Walks allow us to reflect on it. Please sign our petition asking Obama to be the third President to issue the truly mind, body and spirit fitness challenge of Roosevelt (a Dutch-Irishman) and Kennedy (an Irishman).

The Kennedy "can-do," spirit, a favorite ad-age of Paul's, inspires "hope for better days to come (Ad Van Der Loo)," while transcending political, even international, boundaries.