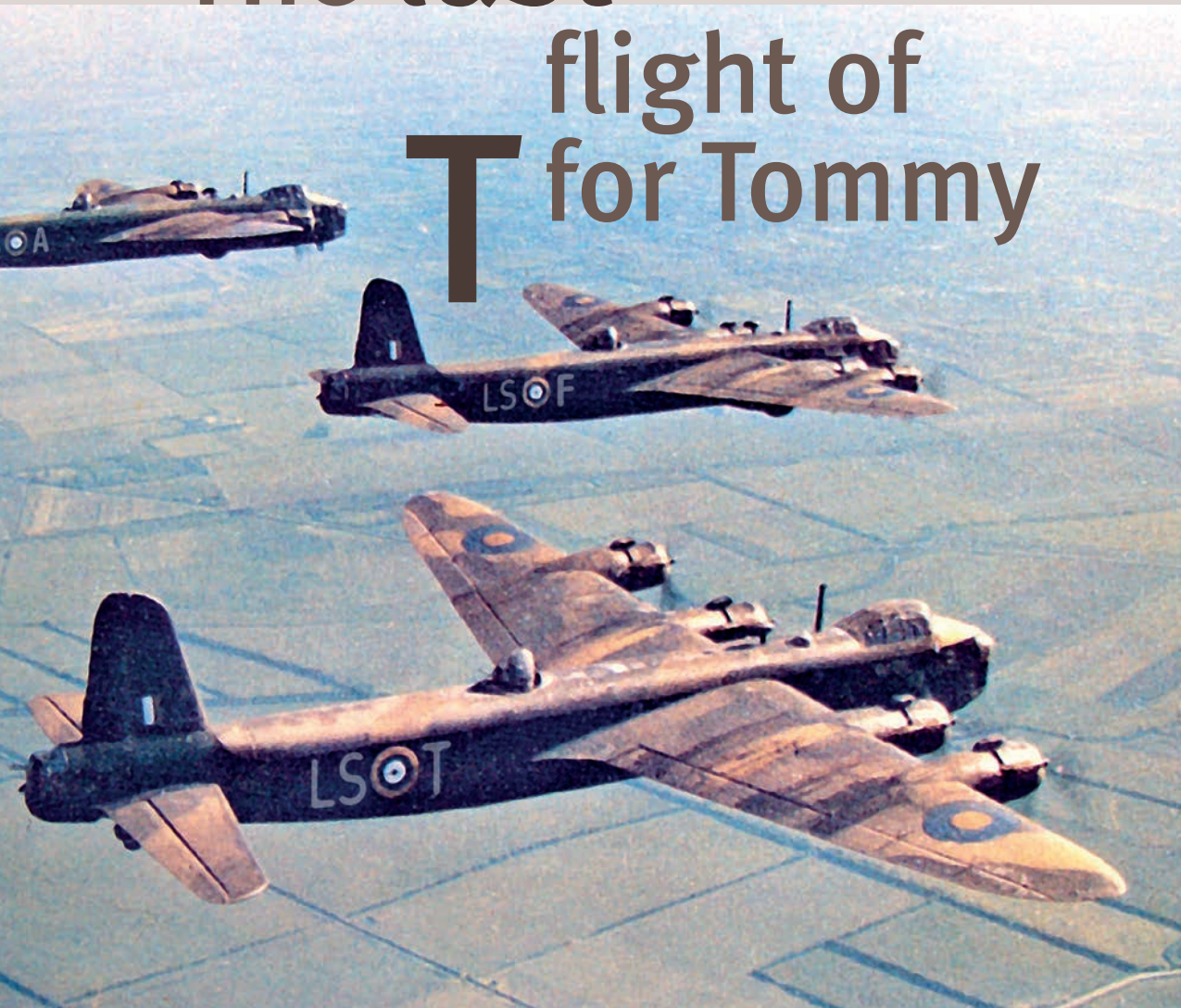


# The last flight of T for Tommy



Harry Bouwman



## Index

Foreword	5	The 'hole' at Egmond	50
Preface	6	Stellung Hase - Station Hare	51
Pre History	8	Werner Rapp	51
Adolf Hitler	8	Bail out	52
Bombs on Germany	9	The parachute	52
War in the air	10	Ben Hagen	53
The Spitfire	10	An unknown English airman	53
Mocking song	10	Eye-witnesses	54
Night raids	11	The demolition of aircraft wrecks	54
Losses of the RAF and USAAF	11	The Caterpillar club	55
The Netherlands occupied	12	Dr. Mijs	56
Government in wartime	12	The resistance	57
Radio Orange	12	'Going underground'	59
The identification card	13	How the war progressed	60
Ration cards	14	The winter of starvation	62
Mass resistance	15	Operation Manna	63
The Royal Air Force	17	Operation Exodus	63
Short Stirling Mk 1	18	The end of the Second World War	64
The last flight of 'T for Tommy'	20	The fortunes of Jim Perring	65
Telex	20	Imprisonment	65
The preparations	21	A small report from the POW camp	66
The short Stirling	21	MI 9 report	67
Stirling R9168	22	Findings	68
The propeller on the bomb	25	From German, Dutch, and English archives	69
World war ii bombs	25	Wochenlagebericht	69
Pamphlets and presents	26	Abschussliste of III/NJG1	69
The briefing	27	Bomber Command loss card	72
Humour during the war	29	Operations Record Book No.15 Squadron	73
Preparing for take-off	30	The flight of 'F for Freddy'	73
The aircrew whistle	31	Night Raid Report	74
Carrier pigeons	31	Airfield Bourn	76
Rescue at sea	33	From Jim Perring's logbook	76
T for Tommy's crew	34	The new memorial	77
The Morse code	35	The story of John and Charlie	78
Blackout	36	Memorial services	79
Relief tube	39	The Airmen's Memorial in Dronten	79
Take-off	40	Air Gunners' statements	80
On the way to Diepholz	41	Aircraft recovery in the Netherlands	80
Navigation	41	The Lancaster bomber	81
The IJsselmeer	45	Dedication	81
On target	46	Poppy Day	81
The German FLAK	46	The poppy	82
Dope	47	The processing	83
Bombing	48	Adopted by 'Het Mosterdzaadje'	84
Fatal end	49	Times past	84
The Messerschmitt Bf 110	49	Frank Millen	85
'Window'	50	The liberation of the Netherlands	88
The German radar stations	50	Sources	91



Preface

This book has been written in memory of the British Stirling bomber and its crew which crashed in the woods near Gortel on 16th December 1942. Six young crew members lost their lives. After the war a modest memorial sign was placed near the spot where the aircraft crashed. However, over the years this monument disappeared. When I heard of this in January 1992, I went and found the crash spot with the help of a retired game keeper. We even found a switch belonging to the emergency intercom which after fifty years was still very much intact! This was the day that an idea to erect a new monument with the help of a group of schoolchildren was born. Approval for the plan was given by HRM Queen Beatrix herself as the monument would be situated on royal ground. On 23rd June 1992 a simple stainless steel cross was placed at the site of the crash. The names of the perished crew as well as the details of the aircraft have been engraved on the cross. Field-stones were cemented at the base of the cross by the pupils from group 8 of the then existing primary school 'De Kosterstraat' in Vaassen.

I have tried to collect as much information as possible concerning the last flight of these young airmen. After so many years this was only partially possible. However a lot of information was successfully collected. All this data has been combined with general information. No fiction has been added. Standard procedures and existing facts have been described to form a reconstruction. As a result a picture as close to the real event as possible has developed. In this

book I have tried to describe the circumstances under which the airmen of the Royal Air Force had to do their dangerous job. There is hardly any county in the Netherlands that doesn't have a grave of a fallen soldier. In total 18.160 men of Great Britain and the British Commonwealth are buried in the Netherlands, spread over 480 cemeteries. The story of T for Tommy is representative of many other raids of Bomber Command of which aircraft crashed and met their final fate in the Netherlands.

After the first edition in 1993 there appeared to be a need for a re-print in 2013, which had been presented to 1.200 schoolchildren in the region. In addition to details of the raid on Diepholz and the crash in Gortel that followed, this edition gives thought to the consequences of the war in the Netherlands. The German invasion, the occupation, persecution of the Jews, the resistance and the liberation are reviewed. Also the original story of the air attack has been supplemented and updated. Contact was made with James Perring, the son of the surviving tail gunner, shortly before the completion of the manuscript. He helped me with his father's log book. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all the people who helped me with information. My sincere thanks to Albert Smit and Kristel Zandman from 'Ga Creatief' for the fantastic design of this book. A special word of thanks to Mr. G.J. Zwanenburg, retired Recovery Officer of the Royal Netherlands Air Force, who was willing to write the foreword in this book and who provided me with many pictures from his files. He also read the manuscript of this book and corrected it for any historical inaccuracies. His professional help in the compilation of this book was of priceless value to me.

This English edition has been elaborated with new facts and photo's. My thanks to the numerous people from the Netherlands and abroad who made this English version possible. Shelley Tietema-Price deserves my warmest gratitude for the translation of this book.

Harry Bouwman,  
Steenwijk, January 2015



Remnants of 'T for Tommy' found in the spring of 1992





## Pre History

After Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933 he also took over command in Austria under threat of armed forces. This happened in 1938. After that, in 1939, it was Czechoslovakia's turn. France and England warned Hitler that he had to refrain from attacking any other country. Hitler promised the British prime minister, Lord Chamberlain, that it wouldn't happen again. However the German troops were already preparing to go into action again. On 1st September 1939 they invaded Poland. The capital Warsaw was bombarded. Following this on 3rd September 1939, Britain and France declared war on Hitler. Hitler still continued his raids and although he had promised not to abuse the neutrality of Norway, this country was attacked in April 1940. Denmark was also overrun.



### Adolf Hitler

*Adolf Hitler was born in 1889 in Austria. After failing to make it as an artist he fought during World War I as a corporal in the German army. Here his eyes were injured by poison gas. Germany lost the war and had to pay a huge amount of compensation to Belgium and France. Many people were poor and unemployed. In 1923 Hitler staged a coup in Germany. This failed and Hitler was sent to prison. After his release he became leader of the N.S.D.A.P., the National Socialist German Workers Party, simply known as the Nazi's.*

*Hitler took advantage of the poverty and the discontent of the Germans to get the people on his side. He promised them all work and a Volkswagen car. The roads being built would be very valuable to the army that Hitler had secretly formed. The NSDAP held large demonstrations with Hitler whipping up the German people with his bragging speeches. Sturm Abteilung men, the S.A., were rough on opponents to keep them quiet. People who protested against Hitler ended up in concentration camps. The soldiers of*

*Göring the head of SS (Schutz Staffel an elite unit) were more fanatic than the men of the SA. Hitler's ideal was to build a large German empire reflecting no place for Jews as they were blamed for the poverty in Germany. Goebbels became minister of propaganda; he led the Holocaust. In 1933 Hitler became Minister President. A year later he was elected president. In 1938 Hitler forced Austria to join him, the first European victims had fallen.*

The Dutch people were hoping to stay out of the war. Our country had declared itself neutral just as it had done during World War I. Our army was mobilized on 29th August 1939 as the threat of war increased. However the armament was poor. Many weapons were outdated and due to cuts in defense before the war, there was a shortage of everything. The land forces didn't have any tanks, a lot of our soldiers used bikes as transport. Our country only owned 139 aircraft of which only 43 were modern.

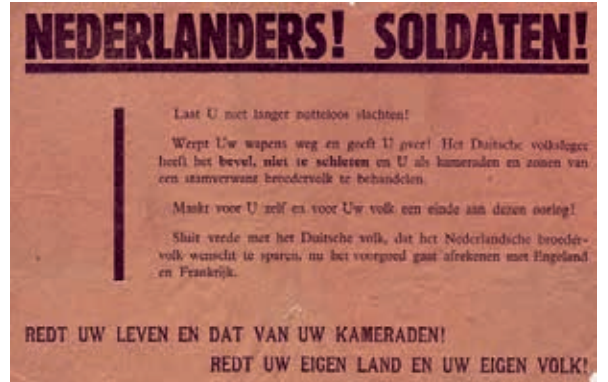
At 03:55 on Friday 10th May 1940, just before Pentecost, the Germans invaded our country. During this action they were supported by paratroops. German soldiers were brought behind the Dutch defense lines with the use of large transport aircraft. The prime target was The Hague to capture the Queen. Prince Bernhard personally sat behind the guns on the family roof to defend his home.

Our soldiers fought bravely against the strong German army for five long days. Fiercely fighting on the Afsluitdijk and the Grebbeberg in particular. The situation became so dangerous that

Queen Wilhelmina and the government retreated to England. Hitler thought it was all taking too long. Rotterdam was bombed on 14th May to try and force the Netherlands to surrender. Hitler threatened to do the same with other cities. The commander-in-chief of the Dutch army, General Winkelman, realised that any further resistance was useless. More human lives would be lost. The Netherlands surrendered.

Our pilots and anti-aircraft defences had however managed to disable a large part of the German air force, the Luftwaffe. Of the thousand aircraft sent to attack the Netherlands, 341 were lost and another 100 were damaged. That was over one third of the German capacity and at no other time during World War II did the Luftwaffe lose so many aircraft in such a short period of time. The question remains how the Battle of Britain would have ended if the German air force had not suffered these losses....

*In 1940 during May these notices were dropped from the German aircrafts. The Dutch military were being called to surrender. The pretext of the German attack was the assertion that the British and French needed the Dutch territory to attack the Ruhr.*



### Bombs on Germany

*In response to the bombing of Rotterdam, Churchill, who had only been Prime Minister for four days, immediately decided that RAF bombs should also be dropped on targets in Germany itself. The next night 93 bombers bombed the arms factory of Krupp in Essen. On 9th August 1939 Reichsmarschall Göring bragged about the power of the Luftwaffe saying "If an enemy bomber should ever succeed in reaching the Ruhr then my name is no longer Hermann Göring. Then you may call me Meier." The Krupp factories in Ruhr were often bombed during the war. Radio Orange had a song that ended with the line "all that is left of the Krupp factory is the sidewalk". (The Dutch word for sidewalk, 'stoep', rhymes with Krupp.)*



Winston Churchill.

## War in the air

Once the Netherlands, Belgium and the north of France had become overrun by the Germans, the British army tried to save itself. The British soldiers who had come to the aid of the countries which had been attacked by the Germans, retreated to Dunkerque. From there they were evacuated to England by the British Navy, with help of the Dutch Royal Navy. All possible means were used, even small leisure crafts.

At that time Britain stood alone against the superior German army. However, Britain did not accept Hitler's peace offer. Churchill, the new Prime Minister, was determined to fight back until Hitler was defeated. Thus began the Battle of Britain in the summer of 1940. The Germans started to build an invasion fleet in the harbours of the conquered nations. The German air force attacked. Bombers, escorted by fighters, tried to demolish British airfields.



### De Spitfire

*The Spitfire was one of the RAF's best fighters. This single seat-aircraft with a strong Rolls Royce engine could reach a speed of 721 km per hour climbing 6095 meters in seven minutes. The ceiling was 13,565 meter, the range was 1368 kilometers. The aircraft had a wingspan of 11.23 meters and a length of 9.96 meters. The armement varied from 8 x .303's during the Battle of Britain to a varying of machineguns and/or 20 mm cannons and provisions for bombs and rockets later in the war.*

The Royal Air Force fought courageously against the German Luftwaffe. The British fighter pilots attacked the assailants in their Spitfires and Hurricanes, sometimes with odds of one against eight. In the meantime, Bomber Command attacked German ships in the continental harbours. The outcome was a real toss-up. The RAF had a bit of luck on 24th August when the Luftwaffe accidentally bombed London. In retaliation the British bombed Berlin the following night. This prompted Hitler to order the bombing of English cities, instead of military targets. This made it possible for the RAF to regain its strength and in September 1940 it became clear that the Germans had lost the Battle of Britain.

Churchill expressed his admiration of the RAF's fighter pilots in his speech: "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few." Britain's position remained precarious.

### Mocking song

*Following the unsuccessful attack on England the Dutch children sang; "oh little painter boy what have you started with all the guns and bombs you cannot touch England"*

The army had to leave virtually all its weapons in Dunkerque and had to be re-armed. At sea, only British Navy vessels were active against the enemy. The Royal Air Force was the only means to hit the Germans on their own territory. And that happened. Just as the Luftwaffe had done in Britain, the British started to attack German industrial cities to cripple the German war industry and to break the resistance of the civil population. "We will pay the Germans back - and we will pay them back double", said Prime Minister Churchill in a speech.

The Bomber Command's Commander in Chief, Arthur Harris, worded it as follows: "They've sown the wind and now they are going to reap the whirlwind." Almost every night the British bombers flew over the Netherlands protected by darkness.

### Night Raids

*On 18th December 1939 a daytime air-attack of 24 Wellingtons was intercepted by the Luftwaffe over the German coast. Ten were shot down, only three of the 24 aircraft returned undamaged. Following this it was decided that the RAF would only fly at night.*



Arthur Harris earned himself the nickname 'Bomber Harris'.

Again and again the German targets were bombed. In December 1941 the United States became involved in the war, which meant that the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) started to participate from July 1942. The American bombers flew in large formations during the day. The suppressed people of the Netherlands saw their condensation stripes as a sign of hope! The unrelenting bombing weakened Germany, eventually allowing the allied forces to win the war. The regained freedom, however came at a very high price. Thousands of airmen were never to return to base.



### Losses of the RAF and USAAF

*It is largely due to the Bomber Command that Germany lost the Second World War. Defending the airspace swallowed a large part of the German capacity. Also a lot of manpower and materials had to be used to repair the damage. This again at the expense of the manpower of the German army. During the war the RAF and USAAF together carried out 2.570.234 attacks over Western Europe. More than 30,000 aircraft were lost. During the war, the RAF lost 70,253 men of which 47,293 were Bomber Command. The average age was 22 years... More than 90% of the men flying for Bomber Command at the beginning of the war, were killed by the end of the war. The U.S. 8th Strategic Force lost 43,742 men in Western Europe either by death or missing in action. During the war approximately 4,128 aircraft crashed in the Netherlands. The RAF lost 411 fighters and 1,146 bombers killing more than 10,000 crew. The USAAF lost 327 bombers and 244 fighters over our*

*country. 1,100 lost their lives. Approximately 2,000 German aircraft crashed over the Netherlands. Of Bomber Command a total of 20,000 men are still missing. Their names are on the Runnymede Memorial in Egham, West London.*

*Is wasn't until June 28th 2012 that Queen Elizabeth unveiled a monument in Green Park, London honoring Bomber Command.*

*(Source including archive G.J. Zwanenburg)*





# The Netherlands occupied

When the Germans had control of the Netherlands it didn't seem that bad in the beginning. Ordinary life carried on.

## Government in wartime

On May 13th 1940 Queen Wilhelmina and the government moved to England because the situation in the Netherlands was untenable. From there they could continue governing Dutch India and the other colonies. General Winkelman was given command of the country. After the capitulation, the Austrian Seyss Inquart was appointed by Hitler as Reich Commissioner (The Dutch soon started calling him six and a quarter due to his name). He suspended the first and second chamber. Political parties were banned. The only party allowed to continue existing was the NSB of Anton Mussert, The National Socialist movement, set up before the war following the example of the Nazi Party, was in the same league as the Germans. NSB'ers were traitors, who didn't think twice about betraying patriots to the Germans. They received a reward of seven and a half guilders if they indicated a Jew. Betraying six Jews yielded a full week's wages!

## Radio Orange

The first Radio Orange broadcast was on July 28th 1940. A fifteen minute broadcast twice a day. Although the Germans had forbidden everyone to listen to these broadcasts, almost no one cared. That's why, in April 1943 all radio's had to be surrendered, failing to do so carried the threat of severe penalties. By no means did all the Dutch obey this order and they still listened to the popular broadcasts in secret. They gave hope!

Via Radio Orange, Queen Wilhelmina spoke 31 times to the Dutch people. Wilhelmina empathized intensely with occupied Dutch people. Speaking through the radio was her only way to keep in contact with home. The Queen wrote all her own speeches, speaking in the people's language. Although Prime Minister Gerbrandy discouraged the use of the word 'mo'

The Germans tried to make people believe that they came as friends. However the intentions of the occupiers soon became very clear. Scouting was banned because it was too English. The Dutch flag was not to be hung, the Wilhelmus National Anthem could not be sung, portraits of Queen Wilhelmina were banned. German lessons had to be taught in schools. In July 1940 all football organisations were abolished. Radios had to be surrendered, in doing so the Germans wanted to avoid people listened to Radio Orange. The Dutch population sighed increasingly under the occupation. Everyone had to hand over any copper objects and church bells were stolen. These were the raw materials needed for weapons. Silver and nickel coins were replaced by zinc coins and paper banknotes.



for the Germans), the Queen said after the broadcast on September 2nd 1943 "Gerbrandy sir, I have indeed used the word 'mo'".

The Wilhelmina radio speeches were also printed on paper to be distributed by the RAF. Here 's a speech from February 21st 1942.



The silverbon existed before the war.



In 1942 all coins were replaced by zinc coins. Left is a dime from 1942 with the portrait of Queen Wilhelmina. These portraits were cut out to use as pendants.



## OBLIGATIONS for the holder of an identity card

Each holder of an identity card is required to carry the identity card with him at all times and to exhibit on request to any government investigator and to all officials and other persons by whom it is required pursuant to any statutory provision.

Each holder of an identity card is required to hand over his identity card for amendment within 5 days to the town clerk, this includes:

- after his arrival in a town from a location from another municipality or abroad
- after relocation or change of address within the municipality
- after the change of his profession
- after the ceremony or dissolution of his marriage and his change of sex or names

When going abroad one has the same obligation, either on the day or within a maximum of five days before departure.

Moreover, the identity must IMMEDIATELY be surrendered by the holder when replacing or upgrading in the following situations:

- the period (5 years) has elapsed;
- the mayor so demands;
- one of the data concerning his person, his photo, his finger prints, a seal or signature is missing, no longer complies with the facts or is unclear or illegible.

The offering or return of the identity card must be done in person by the holder or with registered mail. All identity cards of members of a family or cohabitation may be represented or surrendered by one family member.

Following death the identity card must be surrendered by the principal of the deceased.



## The identification card

The identification card was announced on November 2nd 1940 and introduced in June 1941. Personnel details were noted on it; name, place of birth, address, occupation and a finger print. Each had its own identity number. Falsifying was possible but was only done by the resistance. Jews had a large 'J' stamped on the identity card. A copy of all these personal documents was stored in the building 'Kleykamp' in The Hague meaning that the Germans could always check the numbers. At the request of the Dutch underground the building was bombed on April 11th 1944.





Everyone from the age fourteen years and older had to carry an identity card. On it was noted exactly who you were, what you did and where you lived. As the Germans confiscated a lot of food and other necessities, there was a shortage of all kinds of things. To obtain food you needed ration cards.

Ration cards

To ensure a fair allocation of scarce items among the population - also during the First World War - the distribution system was introduced. Sugar was rationed as early as October 1939. In July 1940 butter, fat and soap were rationed. Followed quickly by textiles, meat, cheese, cookies, biscuits, cakes and eggs.

In addition to money you also needed ration cards to buy things. As the shortages grew, more and more items were added to the ration cards. The ration cards had to be collected at a distribution office, usually a post office or city hall. To be eligible for a ration card you required a personal identity card. This card registered rations collected. For the people in hiding it was impossible to obtain an identity card which also meant no ration cards. Because of this a lot of distribution offices were broken into and ration cards stolen by the Resistance.

Aardappelen	Aardappelen	Aardappelen	VLEESCH	VLEESCH	VLEESCH	VLEESCH	VLEESCH	VLEESCH	VLEESCH	VLEESCH	VLEESCH
46	47	48	48A	47A	46A	45A	44A	43A	42A	41A	
Aardappelen	Aardappelen	Aardappelen	48B	47B	46B	45B	44B	43B	42B	41B	
46	47	48	VLEESCH	VLEESCH	VLEESCH	VLEESCH	VLEESCH	VLEESCH	VLEESCH	VLEESCH	
ALGEMEEN	ALGEMEEN	ALGEMEEN	VOEDINGSMIDDELEN VOOR HOUDESS VAN DE DOVERAAN GA 401				BONNENST				
266	271	276	11e EN 12e PERIODE 1944 (1 OCTOBER - 25 NOVEMBER)				KA411-412				
ALGEMEEN	ALGEMEEN	ALGEMEEN	RESERVE	RESERVE	RESERVE	RESERVE	RESERVE	RESERVE	RESERVE	RESERVE	
267	272	277	A95	A95	A91	A89	A87	A85	A83	A81	
ALGEMEEN	ALGEMEEN	ALGEMEEN	RESERVE	RESERVE	RESERVE	RESERVE	RESERVE	RESERVE	RESERVE	RESERVE	
268	273	278	A96	A94	A92	A90	A88	A86	A84	A82	
ALGEMEEN	ALGEMEEN	ALGEMEEN									
269	274	279									
ALGEMEEN	ALGEMEEN	ALGEMEEN	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	
270	275	280	48A(4)	47A(4)	46A(4)	45A(4)	44A(4)	43A(4)	42A(4)	41A(4)	
ROTER	ROTER		BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	
46A	47A		48A(3)	47A(3)	46A(3)	45A(3)	44A(3)	43A(3)	42A(3)	41A(3)	
46B	47B		BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	
ROTER	ROTER		48A(2)	47A(2)	46A(2)	45A(2)	44A(2)	43A(2)	42A(2)	41A(2)	
RESERVE	RESERVE	RESERVE	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	BROOD	
A102	A103	A104	48A(1)	47A(1)	46A(1)	45A(1)	44A(1)	43A(1)	42A(1)	41A(1)	



In October 1940 all officials and students had to sign a declaration stating they were not Jewish. A month later, all Jews were dismissed. A little later, Jews were told they were not welcome in parks or public buildings. In September 1941 signs started appearing with the text 'Jews forbidden'. Jews were no longer allowed in parks, swimming pools, sports facilities, libraries or hotels. Jewish teachers and children were expelled from school. Starting in April 1942 all Jews had to wear a yellow star on their clothing. Later that year, Jews could no longer travel, cycle or use the telephone. People who openly didn't agree with the German government were arrested. In Vught and Amersfoort concentration camps were set up where people were imprisoned. In Westerbork a transit camp was set up for Jewish people. From there, prisoners were transported to concentration camps in the east. It was here that six million Jews were murdered. Young men were summoned to work in Germany: 'the Arbeitseinsatz'. To escape the German occupation people went into hiding. The Dutch were glad that at least one country in Europe didn't let Germany get the upper hand. Every night British bombers flew over our country to overcome the Nazis. From the 2nd half of 1943 they were helped by the bigger formations of the U.S. Army Air Force. Every day and every night brave men flew their bombers over Netherlands, on their way to Germany. This was called 'round the clock bombing'.

Mass resistance

Several times large groups of people rebelled against the Germans. In February 1941 in Amsterdam a strike broke out due to the oppression of the Jews. The Germans retaliated with blood.

A much larger strike took place in the spring of 1943 as all ex-soldiers from the former Dutch army had to re-register as prisoners allowing the Germans to seize 100,000 people to work in Germany.

On April 30th strikes broke out all across the country; farmers, labourers and factory workers refused to go to work.

In September 1944 our government, situated in England, called for a rail strike. This meant the Germans could not use the railways for military transport. Seyss-Inquart then decided that food shipments to the west were not allowed to be shipped. That meant the beginning of the Hunger Winter.

War Memorial in the aluminum industry in Vaassen

In Vaassen they striked too. In April 1943 workers of the Vulcan foundry and industry situated on 'Dorp Street' participated in this strike. During the night of May 1st and May 2nd, twenty



The Star of David was introduced on May 2nd 1942. It was compulsory for all Jews to wear this star in a position that could be seen. The star was distributed by the Jewish board. The Jews even had to pay; four cents each and for four stars using rationcard points for textile.





employees from both companies were arrested by the Germans and after a stay in camp Vught released again. A number of others involved in the strike, were sentenced to death. One of these, William van Norel, managed to escape by jumping out of the transport truck at Wenum.

On 4th May 1943 three men were executed in the woods near Arnhem.

On May 4th 1946 a monument was erected in front of the industry. The inscription reads 'faithful to his fatherland'. Eight names are engraved on the monument.

Three of the named were executed on 4th May 1943 due to the strike. The others were killed elsewhere.



16

In the monument is a charter cemented with the text:

On the fourth day of the fifth month in the year 1946. In the forty-eighth year of our respected Queen Wilhelmina. On the eve of the first anniversary of the total liberation of the Netherlands from the German invasion, in the presence of invited guests, this award is erected in memory of the employees in our Company who sacrificed their lives either by execution or in a concentration camp for the cause of freedom. This monument was created in their honor to express the Netherlands will to want to resurrect. This is confirmed by the following signatures. Signed by the following dignitaries: Mayor Diepenhorst, Chief Forester Brandsma on behalf of the Illegal Council, Slot, chairman Oranjecommissie, President-Commissioner Ligthart, Bouwmeester on behalf of personnel, De Wilde chairman of factory."

## The Royal Air Force

The bomber which crashed near Gortel was an aircraft of No. 15 Squadron RAF. This squadron was part of No.3 Group of RAF Bomber Command.

Bomber Command was the RAF unit charged with the bombing of German targets. It also laid mines, which was called 'gardening'. Bomber Command consisted of five groups, each with its own number. Each group consisted of about 200 to 300 aircraft. Each group used its own type of aircraft. The groups were divided into squadrons. Each squadron consisted of 20 to 25 aircraft, divided into two groups, the A-flight and the B-flight. Each squadron also had its own number. Just like No. XC Squadron (90 sqn), and some other squadrons, No. 15 Squadron was also identified by Roman numerals : No. XV Squadron. Each squadron had its own letter code painted on the aircraft. In addition each aircraft had its own call-letter. The Bomber Command squadrons were stationed at 93 airfields mainly in Eastern England. From there they started their dangerous raids.

The people who flew for the RAF were all volunteers. No. 15 Squadron consisted not only of Englishmen but also Americans, Canadians, Australians, and New Zealanders. Due to a number of brave undertakings 15 Squadron earned itself the nickname 'The fighting fifteenth'.

Usually the crew of a Stirling bomber consisted of seven people:

- Pilot
- Flight Engineer
- Wireless Operator
- Observer, Navigator
- Bomb Aimer
- Mid-upper Gunner
- Rear Gunner.

This wing was found at a recovery in the Flevopolders.



Sometimes an eighth person joined the crew. This was usually a young pilot who came along as second pilot (second dickey) with an experienced crew. In this way he could gain some experience before flying as a captain himself.

In most cases all the positions on board were filled by sergeants. Sergeant was the lowest aircrew rank within the RAF.

The ranks within the RAF were:

### Non-commissioned Officer:

- Sergeant
- Flight Sergeant
- Warrant officer

### Officer:

- Pilot Officer
- Flying Officer
- Flight Lieutenant
- Squadron Leader
- Wing Commander
- Group Captain



Sergeant's Rank Insignia.



15 Sqn WWII badge with the Kings crown of Tudor on top.



Each crew member wore a badge above the left breast pocket showing their job.

That of the gunner were the letters AG (air gunner).

The badges of the other crew members were the letters

N (Navigator), E (flight engineer), B (bomb-aimer), S (wireless operator / signaller), O (observer). The captain wore the double wings of a pilot with the letters RAF.

17





## The last flight of 'T for Tommy'

**Wednesday 16th December 1942.** The telex at the Bourn airfield's main building, 50 miles north of London, rattles. A message is received from Bomber Command Head Office stating that another raid on Germany is planned for that night. Eight Stirling bombers from 3 Group will execute the operation. No. 15 Squadron RAF based at this airfield will need to supply three aircrafts for the raid. The message 'Ops on' - operations on, coming tonight - causes feverish activity at the base. The squadron commander is informed, the aircrafts selected and the pilots who will be flying are informed. For this raid it's F/O Cooke, F/Sgt Mc.Monagle and P/O Millen. Each one of them then informs his own crew who can be found in the modest barracks where they are posted.

Most pilots prefer to fly with a permanent group. Such a group of airmen is called the crew. Each crew finds their own team, this being extremely important as each one is responsible for the safety of the other. Together the men form a well-oiled machine.

The crew in turn always prefers to fly the same aircraft each time. In this way the men not only get to know each other but also the bomber in which they fly over and over again. They also learn to work together. Also changing an aircraft is considered a bad omen. For good luck, many airmen always carry a sixpence with them when they are up in the air.

During the morning, flight details are constantly being received: the target, the bomb load, and the moment of attack. Telephone calls go to all the departments involved in the preparations. The bomb store is informed about the number of bombs needed. The required amount of fuel is calculated. The meteorological department starts collecting data about the weather conditions. The weather on the continent is extremely important for a bombing flight.

20

### Telex

The telex was a kind of predecessor of the email. Telex is a form of communication where two automatic typewriters are connected with each other via a telephone line. If one typewriter was typing a message, the other machine could display it on paper. The telex was used considerably during World War II.



## The preparations

*Three Stirlings from 15 Squadron along the runway.*

Outside it's raining slightly. At the dispersals along the takeoff strip the three bombers are being prepared. The men of 15 Squadron have been flying with Short Stirling bombers since April 1941. These enormous machines with their four engines are much larger than the twin engined Wellingtons and Blenheims previously used by the squadron. The Stirling is the largest RAF bomber. The aircraft has a length of 87 feet and a wingspan of 99 feet. The main wheels of the landing gear have a diameter of 6 feet which means that an adult man cannot look over the top whilst standing next to one. At the back, just in front of the rear turret is a double tail wheel. All other RAF bombers only have one such wheel. A disadvantage of the Stirling is that its maximum flying height is 17,000 feet, whereas for example a Lancaster can fly at a height of 24,500 feet. The pilots of 15 Squadron are the first to fly with this aircraft.

### The Short Stirling

*The Short Stirling was the largest four-engined bomber of the RAF. It had a wingspan of 30.20 meters and a length of 26.59 meters, the height of the aircraft was 6.93 meters but the maximum flight altitude was lower than the later designed Lancaster; 5,180 meters, the range was 3235 km, the maximum speed 434 km/hour. Armament consisted of eight guns, two in the nose turret, two in the mid-upper turret and four in the tail turret. The maximum bomb load was 1588 kilo's, the crew consisted of seven or eight people. In total 2374 Stirlings were built of which none still exist today. On February 10th 1941 the Stirling was used for the first time over enemy territory; involving an attack on Shell in Rotterdam, three Stirlings from No.7 Squadron took part. In April 1941 No. 15 Squadron become the second Stirling squadron.*



*Once the Lancaster began playing a greater role in the bomb raids, the Stirling was successfully used in other roles: dropping para's and glider towing for D-Day and Arnhem and later for dropping weapons to the resistance.*

21



## Pamphlets and presents

One of the first activities of Bomber Command over occupied Netherlands was dropping pamphlets. For the Dutch, these were newspapers encouraging the people. For the Germans they were messages to undermine morale. From 1941 presents were regularly dropped over the Netherlands by the bombers on their way to Germany. Things like tea bags, cigarettes or matches or photographs of members of the Royal family. Messages were written on the presents like 'Netherlands will rise', 'take courage' and 'Victory is approaching'. Some bombers only command was to cast off these presents.



In addition to the bombs the Stirling 'T for Tommy' is loaded with pamphlets. These pamphlets are small newspapers complete with pictures. They have names like 'de Wervelwind' (the Whirl Wind), or 'RAF Post'. Each month millions of them are printed. On the way back over the Netherlands they will be thrown out of the aircraft in large bundles through the flare tube. They are meant to encourage the suppressed Dutchmen on the ground.

The newspapers contain all sorts of news about the development of the war. Otherwise people in occupied territories could only read news that is censored by the Germans. News which is unfavourable for the Germans will not have been included in the daily newspapers.

The pamphlets sometimes contain instructions such as how to make a device to listen to the BBC radio without interference from the Germans.

Over Germany pamphlets in German are dropped off. They have names like 'Luftpost' and 'Feldpost'. In these pamphlets the power of the allied forces is described to discourage the German population. The Germans are advised not to listen to Hitler any longer.

Finally the aircraft is fuelled. The Stirling is fitted with 14 fuel tanks: 7 in each wing. For long distances it is possible to carry an extra six auxiliary tanks in the wing bomb cells, three on each side. These are not necessary for this night's flight.

All tanks, except two, are self sealing. They won't start leaking if pierced by a bullet. The two tanks that are not self sealing are always used directly at take off.

The normal tanks can hold 2254 gallons of fuel. The auxiliary wing bomb cell tanks can hold a total of 438 gallons. The aircraft uses 180 gallons solely for take off and climbing to 3000 feet. That is 45 gallons per engine!

In this leaflet RAF Commander Arthur Harris tells the German people not to listen to Hitler.



## The briefing

While the ground crew is busy with the last preparations, the air crews meet for the briefing. The briefing is a gathering of the various air crews in a meeting room where they are informed of the night's target. The men noisily enter the briefing room. They seat themselves on benches behind long tables. All of them are still young men. There are boys among them who do not even have a driver's licence yet but they are perfectly able to fly a heavy bomber. There is a lot of laughter and nervous talking. "When I come back I am going to marry my Mary."

Before the briefing there is always tension and uncertainty. What will the target be this time? The men look anxiously towards the curtain at the front of the room. Behind the curtain is the map of Europe showing the target area.

Once all the men are gathered a party of high ranking officers enters. The humming of the men's voices silences. The base commander opens the meeting and announces the evening's target: "Gentlemen, the target for tonight is the Luftwaffe training field near Diepholz, south west of Bremen."

For a moment there is some relieved mumbling. Great, they do not have to go to the Ruhr area, which is known throughout Bomber Command as 'Happy Valley'. This area, with its heavy German war industry, is the most defended region of Germany. The German anti aircraft guns, the FLAK, is more intense there than anywhere else in Germany. Berlin, 'the Big City', is not the target of this raid either. That would have been a very long flight. An attack on the capital of the Third Reich means a flight of nine to ten hours! Diepholz is much nearer not even 600 km. With a bit of luck it is a flight of 3 to 4 hours.

The curtain in front of the map is removed. All eyes are fixed on the red ribbon that indicates the route to be flown. An officer gives an explanation. After that various information is given. The squadron commander talks about the anti aircraft defense near Diepholz. "And keep your eyes peeled for night fighters, chaps!" he finishes his talk. An officer from the meteorological department gives the forecast of the weather over England, the Netherlands, and Germany. There will be some cloud cover over the North Sea but after that it will be clear. Over Diepholz it is expected to be partly clouded. It is expected that the target will be well visible in the moonlight. The wind will be south-south-east. The wind direction is important for the navigators. The wind may push the aircraft off its planned course and the navigators have to take that into account. Also the bomb aimer must be informed of the wind direction and the wind speed to drop the bombs successfully.



Large tankers drive from one to the other bomber.



Briefing room.



# Preparing for take-off

The last moments before take-off are the most difficult. Everyone is nervous. The tension usually decreases a little after the men have boarded the aircraft. Then there is no more time to think about fear. Then everybody is busy and each one thinks: "Nothing will happen to me. It is always another aircraft that will be hit."

Now the airmen are still hanging around in the mess. Some men write a letter to their loved ones. Others just stare in front of them deep in thought. Others play cards or play darts. One by one they go to the toilet.



Mae West.

Then it is time to put on the flight gear: the flying boots, the parachute harness. The pilot is the only one, during the flight, who constantly has his parachute buckled. This forms a cushion to sit on. The other airmen will hang up their parachutes at their workplace and buckle up when needed. There are metal hooks on the front of the parachute so it can be hung up. The men also pull on their life jackets. This is a rubber jacket that can be inflated by compressed air from a cylinder. As the airmen look rather voluminous when they wear these jackets, the jackets are called 'Mae West' after the famous American film star. The tail gunners put on their fur lined suits (Irving Jacket). It will be cold in their turret where the temperature may drop below freezing!

Under their clothes the airmen wear an emergency kit: a small perspex box containing a number of items that can be useful if one comes down over enemy territory. It is only a small box: fifteen by ten by three centimeters but it is unbelievable how much it contains:

This map was recovered in Flevoland after the war.



Hacksaw and compass recovered in Flevoland



This emergency kit contains a lot of necessities that could be used in an attempt to escape.



The small compass was sometimes built into a uniform button.

tablets to purify water, tablets that can serve as food, concentrated chocolate, a couple of pills to keep one awake if required, a fishing line with a hook and a card with a couple of useful phrases in French, Spanish and Dutch. They also carry a watertight little bag that contains French, Belgian and Dutch banknotes, a small compass, a little hacksaw and a map of Western Europe. The maps are made of silk so that they do not disintegrate when they get wet. All these items can be vital during an attempt to escape from enemy territory. All airmen have a whistle that is attached to the collar of their uniform. After an emergency landing they can indentify themselves if say they have a broken leg or have landed in water. Being taken prisoner is better than not being found at all. Finally the oxygen masks are checked, watches synchronized. The navigators put their maps in their bags. Wireless operators ensure they have their code books and frequency tables. A letter to a loved-one is handed to the squadron commander: 'Just in case...' The crew members are given flasks with hot drinks and tuck away special boxes of chocolates. They get these 'operational rations' before each flight. When each man has what he should carry with him, one of them takes the basket with pigeons. Each aircraft carries a couple of homing pigeons on board carried in a small basket. If a bomber has to make a crash landing at sea than the pigeons can be released carrying a message stating the position of the aircraft. For this purpose each pigeon carries a small cylinder with a piece of paper with the particulars of the aircraft pre-printed on it.



Pigeon basket.

## The aircrew whistle

WOp/AG Dennis Salt, 578 Sqn RAF, saved his life by using the aircrew whistle. During a raid on Stuttgart, March 15th 1944, his Halifax bomber was shot down by a German night fighter. After bailing out Dennis found himself falling through space with both legs missing below the knees. He landed in a field, thickly covered in snow. The sound of his whistle warned the Germans, who brought him to hospital. In February 1945 he returned safely to England. In the nineties he paid several visits to the T for Tommy Memorial.



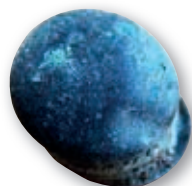
## Carrier pigeons

In August 1940 keeping pigeons in occupied territories was banned by the Germans. Free flying pigeons were shot. The Germans knew that the English were using carrier pigeons for spying purposes. That happened not only in France but also in Belgium and the Netherlands. Boxes containing pigeons were dropped, using a small parachutes, over occupied territory. With the boxes a request written in both French and Dutch to release the pigeons with messages that could be of interest to the English such as defensive positions or the location of factories that were being used by the Germans.





Robert Mc. Killop.



This push button from one of the curtains was found in 1992.

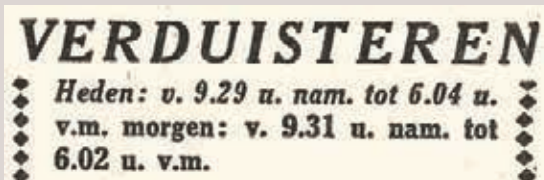
become a navigator. On 17th January 1942 he was promoted to sergeant and was transferred to Scotland and later to Cambridshire in England. It was here he was re-trained for the Stirling bomber. On 15th October he was posted with the RAF's 15 Squadron. Including his training he

## Blackout

The planes were blackened so as not to be seen from the ground. During the war everything on the ground had to be blacked out to avoid being sitting ducks for the bombers. The house windows were obscured by screens or curtains with blackout paper. As electricity was scarce and later in the war was completely cut off, hand dynamos were used as flashlights. Bicycle dynamos were also used to create light in the home. Gerrit Zwanenburg built a regular light bulb socket using a bike light. With this and the use of a battery he could create light via the regular power meaning he had some light here and there in his home.



Dyno touch



Blackout notice in local paper dated August 3, 1942.

has 296 flying hours to his name as bomb aimer. Mc Killop will now start on his seventh flight over enemy territory.

It is his responsibility to drop the bombs at the right moment so that the target is hit properly. He will also have to operate the two machine guns in the front turret if necessary.

Finally there are the two Air Gunners. In the upper turret, on top of the fuselage, right behind the wings sits P/O Ernest Hill. Hill is 20 years old. He comes from Winnipeg, Manitoba, and like Millen, Kieswetter and Holmes, enlisted with the R.C.A.F. During his training as Air Gunner he has had to learn the distinguishing features of all enemy aircraft off by heart. He also had to learn all about the Browning machine gun, and its different parts and how to strip them down. His seat consists of a broad canvas belt topped with a leather seat, above in the aircraft. Through the perspex dome he has to monitor the airspace above the bomber.

Tail gunner Sgt Jim Perring sits all the way down to the rear end of the aircraft. His full name is James Frederick, but his mates call him Jim. He is from Liverpool and was born on 9th September 1916. He is 26 years old and the oldest of the crew. In a lot of squadrons men of his age are jokingly called Grandad. The average age of the men is in fact a lot younger.

His father worked at the docks and Jim himself worked at a bakery after finishing secondary school. In 1937 Jim enlisted in the Royal Air Force and in November 1938 he was sent to Karachi in India. At the end of 1941 he was relocated to South Africa. It was here that he trained to be a gunner. When Jim returned to England he landed in No. XV Squadron. Including all his hours of training, Jim has a total of 116 flight hours for during the day and 130 night flight hours, a total of 246 flight hours. This would be his 15th operation. A few days earlier he and his bride-to-be have announced their engagement. They plan to get married a week later.



Ernest Hill.



The mid-upper turret was located in the middle of the aircraft. This is a picture taken from the front to the back.



Jim Perring.

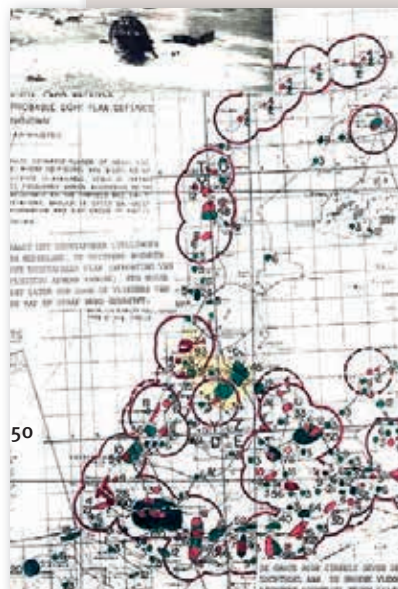
Time carried forward					Flying Time	
Remarks (including results of bombing, gunnery, navigation, etc.)					Day	Night
1-10-42	12-00	STURM	Sgt. MILLER	A.G.	1.20	
"	17-10	A.F. 384	"	"	1.30	
2-10-42	10-30	N 7623	"	"	1.15	
"	16-00	N 9108	"	"	1.40	
"	19-00	R 9168	"	"	1.40	
3-10-42	15-30	A.F. 380	"	"	3.20	
4-10-42	16-00	" 384	"	"	1.15	
5-10-42	14-15	"	"	"	1.15	
6-10-42	19-30	"	"	"	4.00	
7-10-42	10-30	"	"	"	2.05	
8-10-42	18-00	"	"	"	2.5	
18-10-42	14-00	"	"	"	1.15	
19-10-42	15-30	"	"	"	1.30	
20-10-42	11-00	R 9201	"	"	9.00	
21-10-42	11-05	A.F. 384	"	"	9.50	
22-10-42	18-00	"	"	"		
23-10-42	18-05	"	"	"		
TOTAL					106.55	24.10

Jim Perring's logbook shows his operational flights listed in red.





Sometimes the strips were covered with black paper to give them more weight.



A map showing the air defenses in the Netherlands. The 'hole' at Egmond is clear to see.

## 'Window'

Later during the war the British hindered the German radar stations by throwing large amounts of black one-sided aluminium paper strips out of the aircraft. The strips were approximately 30 cm long and gave an echo (blip) just as the echo of a real aircraft on the German radar. This made it impossible to recognise real aircraft. The aluminium paper strips were codenamed 'Window'. This British anti radar system was first used in the notorious raid on Hamburg on 24th/25th July 1943. Seven hundred and ninety one aircraft took part in this raid. The success of Window was reflected in the reduced losses of aircraft.

On the night of 5th/6th June 1944 a clever way of misleading the enemy took place. Six Stirlings took flight to drop a large amount of 'window' above the Channel. This made the Germans think an impending invasion fleet was underway. This was precision work; the 'ghost fleets' had to approach slowly. That's why there were three navigators on board and extra airmen to throw the bundles of window out. In the south west a second much bigger ghost fleet was simulated by 16 Lancasters from No. 617 Squadron. The real invasion fleet on its way to Normandy, left on the morning of the 6th June, far south. This meant the start of the German destruction.

## The German radar stations

The radar stations that had to detect approaching aircraft were called 'Freya's'.

The radar guarding part of the airspace was called 'Würzburg Riese' - big Würzburg. This 15-ton colossus had a dish diameter of 7.5 meters. In 1942 there were already several of these 'Würzburg' radar stations active. Together with the Freya's they guarded the airspace. The stations were mainly situated along the coast, for air and sea targets.

## The 'hole' at Egmond

The Germans placed anti-aircraft guns along the Dutch coast. However, in Egmond, North Holland, during the entire war a 'hole' was strangely apparent in the air defenses. Here the FLAK didn't overlap each other. As the IJsselmeer was also free of anti-aircraft, pilots with damaged bombers tried to get home via this route. Navigating over water, with prominent landmarks such as Urk and the Noordoostpolder made the flight easier. Was Frank Millen trying to bring his crew to safety via Egmond?

The radar stations in the Netherlands were all named after animals for example 'Salzherring' (salted herring) near Den Helder, 'Tiger' at Terschelling, 'Gazelle' near Veendam and 'Hase' (hare) near Harderwijk. Each ground station was able to track one night fighter and one enemy aircraft simultaneously.

Leutnant Rapp receives his instructions from 'Stellung Hase' (station hare). This radar station is located in the meadows at Harderwijk. As soon as an unidentified aircraft is spotted here, he will be sent after it. Rapp does not need to wait long. His radio operator gets the message: "Enemy aircraft approaching from the east!" Guided by the ground radar the night fighter is aimed at its prey. On the plotting table at the ground station, the two dots indicating the night fighter and the enemy aircraft are seen approaching each other getting closer and closer....

Soon Leutnant Rapp can see his target. It is indeed a British bomber. The aircraft is a dark silhouette against the bright sky. Rapp sees a four engined bomber, a Short Stirling. The large vertical fin of the tail is clearly visible sticking up in the air. The Stirling flies low and slowly. Leutnant Rapp carefully manoeuvres into his attack position. Every German pilot knows that the enormous Stirling is virtually defenceless if attacked from below. His only concern is the rear gunner's dangerous machine guns. Rapp positions his aircraft behind the Stirling. He flies a bit lower than the bomber. Rapp approaches carefully. He flips back the safety catch that protects the firing button on his machine guns. With the sky in the background, the bomber is clear in the centre of his sight. Rapp pulls up his aircraft. After getting

## Stellung Hase - Station Hare

The Stellung Hase at Hardewijk was put into use in 1940, the first station inland to bring nightfighters to their goal; the British bombers.

Stellung Hase was blown up by the Germans themselves on 16th April 1945. In the 1970's a residential town was constructed at the location of the former radar station. This town is named 'Stadsweiden' (town's fields). Some pieces of Stellung Hase can still be found near the cycle path from Harderwijk to 'beach' Horst. A piece of concrete from the radar base has been used as the foundation for a slide at a children's playground.



A 'Würzburg' giant (Walcheren 1942) as it stood in Hardewijk.

## Werner Rapp

Lieutenant Werner Rapp started his career as a night fighter pilot with NJG 1 in Twente. After his victory above Gortel with Stirling R9168, Rapp would record even more victories:

3/4-2-1943	Halifax	27/28-5-1943	Halifax
29/30-3-1943	Lancaster and Stirling	11/12-6-1943	Lancaster
23/24-5-1943	Halifax	12/13-6-1943	Lancaster and Halifax

It is not known how many of the 63 crewmembers survived. Rapp was promoted to Lieutenant on 1st June 1943 and transferred to II/NJG5. In April 1945 he became group commander of this unit. In 1945 he claimed five victories on the Eastern Front. Werner Rapp survived the Second World War and passed away in the early '60s.



The last flight of T for Tommy



# Eye-witnesses

According to eye-witnesses the aircraft was hit over Emst. Apparently there was no return fire from the Stirling. The gun burst from the night fighter was short. Thereafter the aircraft burnt violently. Someone from Gortel told me:  
"I was a ten year old girl when it happened. We lived at the Hanendorperweg. I can still remember it very well; it was my mother's birthday. We were just having coffee with some visitors when we heard something outside. My father went outside and called us. Over the Oranjeweg we saw the burning aircraft coming towards us. It flew very low. My father said that we had to stand tightly against the wall of our house. We were not allowed to go inside again. Right above our heads the aircraft changed direction towards Epe again.

The burning aircraft gave so much light that we could almost have read a book. It was so clear; we could see someone from the house near the forest edge, about 200 meters away, taking the

## The demolition of aircraft wrecks

The Germans dragged many crashed aircraft to Camp Westerbork in Drenthe. Here the Jews had to take apart the wreckage, working 60 hours a week. The metal could be used again by the Germans. One of the best known examples of the work done by prisoners at Westerbork was the disassembling of aircraft wreckages and demolishing batteries. It is not unthinkable that the remains of the Stirling R9168 also ended up at Westerbork.

### Camp Westerbork

Camp Westerbork was built in August 1939 as a refugee camp for German Jews who tried to escape Nazism. The camp was taken over by the SS on July 1st 1942 and designated as the transit camp for Jews. A total of approx. 107,000 Jews, the majority through Westerbork, were transported to concentration camps. Only 5,000 of them would survive. Most of the Jews ended up in Auschwitz. This camp was notorious for its slave labour, medical experiments and the number of exterminations. It was here that the people were systematically gassed. Other Jews ended up in Sobibor, Theresienstadt, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald and Ravensbrück. Anne Frank was also prisoner at Westerbork. She died shortly before the liberation in Bergen-Belsen.

Hilter had personally said on 30th September 1943 "I will eradicate Judaism." That's why during the Wannsee conference in January 1942 a list was compiled showing how many Jews had to be destroyed in each country. For the Netherlands it was 160,000 Jews. A train travelled from Westerbork 93 times on a fixed schedule every Tuesday to the east....

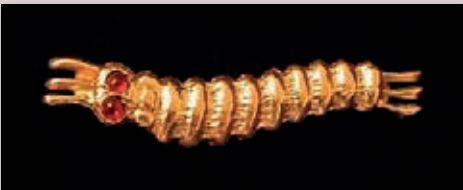


horse out of the stable. The bomber grazed that house and crashed in the forest behind it." Immediately after the crash a lot of people came to watch. The aircraft burned until about ten thirty that night. The flames were blue. Germans arrived on the spot almost immediately and the next day many more Germans came to Gortel. Over the following weeks the aircraft was removed. In 1943 the site of the crash was planted with larch trees.

Sgt Jim Perring ended in the heather field near the crossing Boerweg - Langeweg in a place called the 'High Sand'. Hanging on his parachute he fell through the trees. He hurt his knee rather badly during his jump. Even so Jim Perring managed to get his parachute out of the tree it was stuck in and bury it.

## The Caterpillar Club

Pilots who had their lives saved by the use of their parachute, automatically became members of the Caterpillar Club. The club was founded in 1920 by Leslie Irvin for anyone whose life had been saved by the use of an Irvin parachute. Members wear a badge that represents the caterpillar. Jim Perring was also a member of this club. The club for pilots who landed in the sea was called the Goldfish Club. The pilots who managed to escape from enemy territory back to Britain were associated in the Royal Air Forces Escaping Society.



Caterpillar pin.

Jim Perring's Caterpillar Club membership card.



After that he looked for a hiding place in the woods. A little while later he was found by the 20-year-old Evert Gosselink. Fifty years later Evert Gosselink told me the following story:  
"It was around eight o'clock that night when I was milking the cows. We lived at number 11 Boerweg, where my parents had a farm. While I was sitting under a cow I heard shooting. I ran outside and saw the bomber coming over at a low altitude. I estimated the height at about 300 meters. An instant later I saw the fiercely burning bomber disappear behind the woods. I finished milking the cow and then I went there on my bicycle. The sandy path did not make it easy. My front wheel was fitted with a massive rubber tyre but my rear wheel wasn't. The back tyre blew during the trip so I continued on foot. Close to the Gortel woods I climbed over the fence to walk into the forest. That's where the aircraft must have crashed.

I was right, there it was, still burning strongly. I could get quite close. Then I was told to leave by someone from the Municipal Police. As I was leaving, I was chased by a group of people. I shouted at them that I was a Dutchman. After I had climbed back over the fence I did not see them again. At the Boerweg, on my way home, I suddenly saw someone drop by the side of the road. I approached him and then I heard: "Nazi?" I answered: "No, no, no Nazi - Holland." Then



## How the war progressed

Around the crash of T for Tommy the war took a new turn. In November 1942 the German forces lost a battle for the first time. This happened at El Alamein in Egypt. With the attack on Russia in June 1941, Hitler himself ensured that his armies eventually got into serious trouble. At first the advances of the Germans went smoothly, as the Russians kept withdrawing. However, in the harsh winter of 1942/1943, fortunes changed. The Russians, accustomed to the cold, forced the Germans, who due to the rapid advance had a lack of clothing, food and weapons, further and further west.

After the Germans were driven away out of North Africa, the allied army landed in Sicily in July 1943 using 3,000 vessels. The Italian leader Mussolini, a great friend of Hitler, was forced to experience the loss of a battle.

The occupation in the Netherlands became increasingly grim. The Germans kept the raids of picking up men to go to work in Germany. On October 6th 1943 the launching of kites became strictly forbidden. Signals could be given using kites. Bikes were confiscated. Gasoline for the ordinary people was long gone.

The Germans transformed the Dutch coast into a line of defense: the Atlantic Wall. The beach was off limits. They feared an attack from the sea. Many bunkers in the dunes are still around today.

It was very dangerous at sea for merchant ships. Underwater lurked the danger of German submarines and closer to land, they could be attacked from the air. That's why they transported the cargo in convoys protected by warships.

On June 6th 1944, under General Eisenhower's command, a massive allied army landed on the coast of Normandy. This day would go down in history as D Day: 'Decision Day'. The British and American air forces used 11,000 aircraft and 4,000 ships took part in the landing. 15,000 assault flights were performed during the course of a few days. Paratroopers were also dropped using among others the Stirling. The British, Canadians and Americans forced the Germans back with heavy fighting. Paris was liberated on August 27.



*In some cases an 'Ausweis' (ID) was issued by the Germans, as proof that you were exempt from something. After Market Garden all the 50 called 'Stutzpunkte' (check points) were closed, including Harlingen. Normally you were not allowed in or out unless you could think of a good excuse. You needed this 'Ausweis' in order to get out of town.*

The rapid advance caused panic among the Dutch members of the N.S.B. On September 5th 1944 many of them fled to the east. That day would be called Crazy Tuesday. In the absence of the liberators they came back and the German oppression got worse. In an effort to accelerate the advance, the British General Montgomery came up with the plan of an airbourne advance on the Rhine: Operation Market Garden. On Sunday September 17th 1944, 1,452 aircraft were sent, including a large number of Stirlings and Dakota's. In Arnhem 10,000 paratroopers landed, 'Airbornes', to secure the safety of the Rhine bridge. At the same time the U.S. military was trying to



*Airlanding Oosterbeek.*

push forward from Eindhoven to the north. The plan failed as the army leadership had underestimated the German resistance at Arnhem.

In addition, the weather conditions made the delivery of supplies and reinforcements impossible. Many Americans literally fought death on the road to Nijmegen. This route later received the nickname 'Hell's Highway'. The dykes in Walcheren were bombed in October 1944 ensuring a safe supply of war material through Westerschelde to the harbour of Antwerp. The Dutch population was warned in advance through pamphlets and Radio Orange. The Zeeland island Walcheren was immersed under water and the Germans were expelled.

On the orders of Hitler in December 1944, the German army tried once more to defeat the allies. With the 'Ardennes Offensive' they did everything they could to win the war. Fortunately, the allies were able to hold out. The occupation continued in the Netherlands, only the south was liberated. The Betuwe region was a kind of no man's land. In western Netherlands a terrible famine was in place. 'The Hunger Winter' as it was later called. There was a great lack of fuel and in the big cities people were eating tulip bulbs and sugar beets. What little was still available, was very expensive. Many people from the west went to Gelderland, Overijssel and Drenthe to find food. It often happened that the Germans took everything off them on their way back.

People went to the East of the Netherlands in search of food.



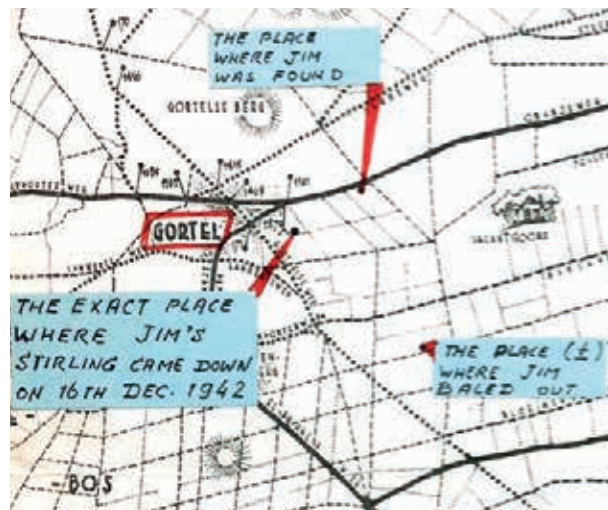
*British tanks passing a crashed fighter.*



## The last flight of T for Tommy

## The last flight of T for Tommy

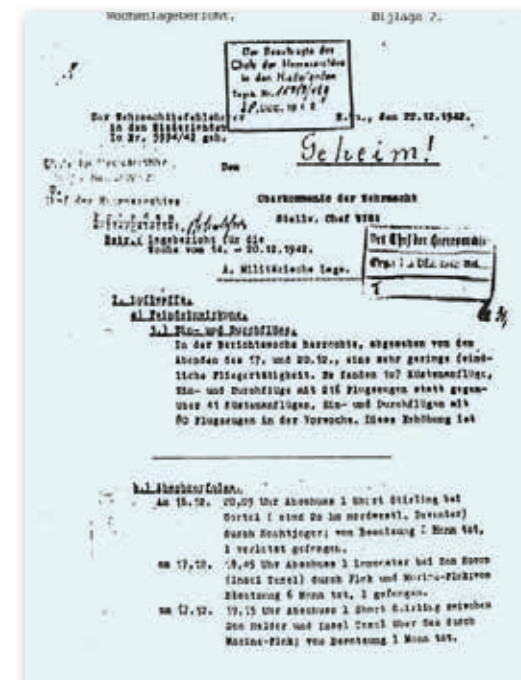




In 1969 Perring visited Docter Mijs's daughter. He also met Evert Gorselink again. The reunion was heart warming. With the help of his Dutch helpers, Jim Perring tried to draw a map showing the circumstances in 1942. Jim Perring passed away on February 8th 1979.

## From German, Dutch, and English archives

The German Wochenlagebericht (Weekly report) from the German Wehrmacht states that in the week of 14th to 20th December 1942: '16th December: 20.09 hrs, 1 Short Stirling was shot down near Gortel (about 20 km north west of Deventer) by a night fighter. Six men of the crew were killed and one injured crew member was captured.' The report was made on 22nd December 1942. From the 'Abschusslist', (the hit list, of the third Gruppe (Group) of the Nachtjagdgeschwader one (night fighter unit) (III/ NJG1)), it appears that the Stirling was the first victim of Leutnant Rapp. Seven weeks later Rapp shot down his second aircraft. Unfortunately, a police report of the crash does not exist (or doesn't exist any more). This can be seen from a letter from the Mayor of Epe to the Commissariat of the Military Power dated 12th December 1945. However, the Harderwijk police report on 17th December 1942 does mention that the aircraft had crashed in the municipality of Epe. A search was requested for a number of occupants who had bailed out. Shortly hereafter the message followed that six bodies had been recovered and that the only survivor had been captured.



Wochenlagebericht (Weekly report)

### Abschussliste of III / NJG1

1. Date. 2. Rank and name of the German pilot. 3. Time of shooting down. 4. Type of aircraft that was shot down and the location. 5. Sequence number of aircraft shot down by this pilot. (Night results.) 6. Column for day results. 7. Sequence number of night results of III/NJG1. 8. Column for day results of III/NJG1. 9. 'Du' means 'Dunkle Nachtjagd' [dark night fight]. During such nights the night fighters were guided by radar. During nights with good visibility, the 'Helle Nachtjagd' [clear nightfight], fighters were not radar assisted.

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
16.12.42	Lt. Rapp	20.09	Short Stirling Gortel, 20 km N. Apeldoorn	1.		83.		Du
17.12.42	Oblt. Lütje	20.10	Lancaster 2 km N. Veenendaal, N. Z. 20 km	15.		84.		Du
20.12.42	Oblt. Bauer	08.45	Hallifax Liedern, 10 km N. Breda	6.		85.		Du
3.1.43	Hptm. Klinger	20.15	Lancaster 15 km S. Velp, 10 km N. Arnhem	1.		86.		Du
20.1.43	Fw. Kleinhenz	08.45	Short Stirling Enschede (Dutch)	1.		87.		Du
1.2.43	Hptm. Phimmig	22.10	Short Stirling Enschede, 2 km N. Breda	10.		88.		Du
3.2.43	Lt. Rapp	20.48	Hallifax Orchestrak, 10 km N. Breda	2.		89.		Du

### Findings

The day after the crash of the bomber, the site became a place where many (young) people went looking for objects. An emergency ration (chocolate) from one of the crew was found shortly after the crash. Also the dinghy, found by A. van Essen from Pollen in Emst, was taken home. In 1944 the boat would have still been used by people of Epe to cross the Rhine. The crossing unfortunately failed. David Schermers found the altimeter, a piece of parachute cord and a list showing the contents of the dinghy's first aid kit. Shortly after the war, the parachute of Perring was found at the edge of the heath in the so-called 'exploitation of Apeldoorn'.



Two unknown attributes found are in Vaassen History Museum. The instrument with the red button is probably an emergency button.

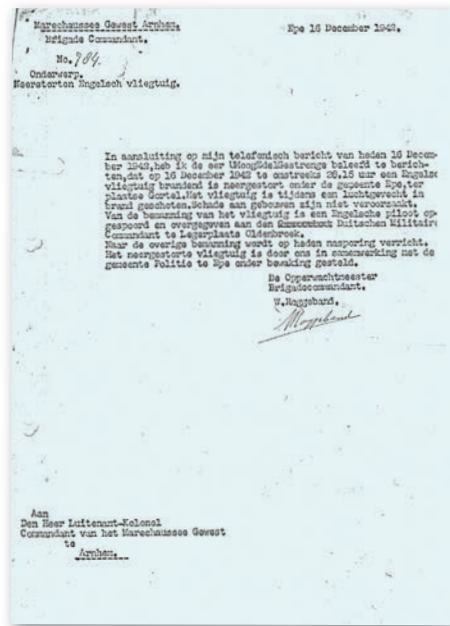
Attributes



Contents first aid kit dinghy





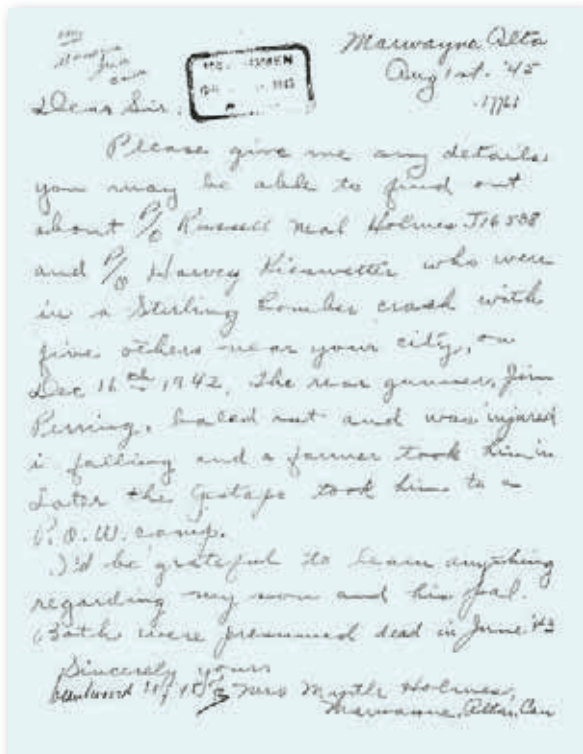
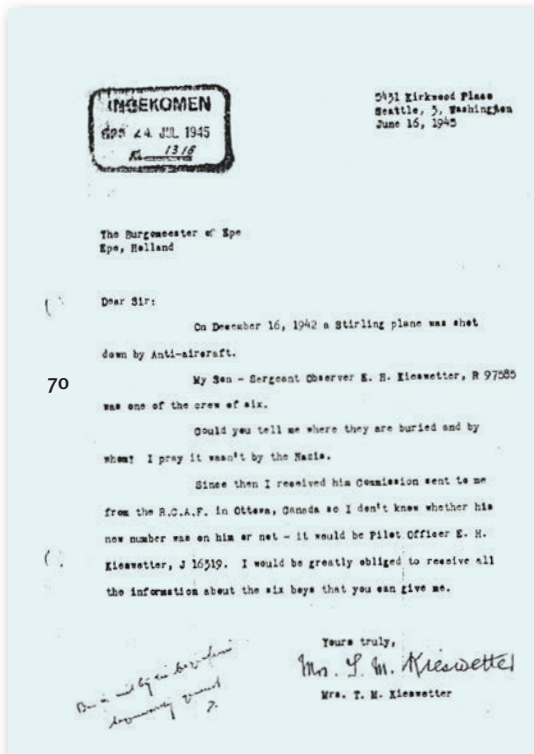


In this letter, dated December 16th 1942, the Commander of the Marechaussee (Dutch Military Police) reported the crash of the British aircraft. One crewmember was transferred to the German Military Command of the Encampment Oldebroek. An investigation was started to find other crew members.

The six crew members who died in the crash were buried on 21st December 1942 at the 'Algemene Begraafplaats' (Municipal Cemetery) at the Tongerenseweg in Epe. That same day the director of the information bureau of the Netherlands Red Cross was informed about this. In the summer of 1945, the Mayor of Epe received letters from the mother of P/O Kiewwetter and from the mother of P/O Holmes. They both asked for details of the fate of their sons who, as Mrs Holmes wrote, were good friends. Mrs Kiewwetter wrote that she hoped that her son was not buried by the Nazi's. Both letters were answered by the Mayor with details of the date and place of the burial. He had been at the funeral himself.

In January 1946 there was some correspondence between the municipality and the Red Cross about the correct inscriptions on the six gravestones. The reports of Bomber Command show that eight Stirling bombers of the 3 Group took off for the raid on Diepholz. Another 20 aircraft (9 Wellingtons, 2 Lancasters, and 9 Stirlings) were assigned to lay mines off the west coast of France, in places such as the mouth of the river Gironde. One aircraft crashed at take-off, killing the entire crew. The other aircrafts returned safely.

After the war Mrs. Holmes and Mrs. Kiewwetter wrote letters to the Mayor of Epe.



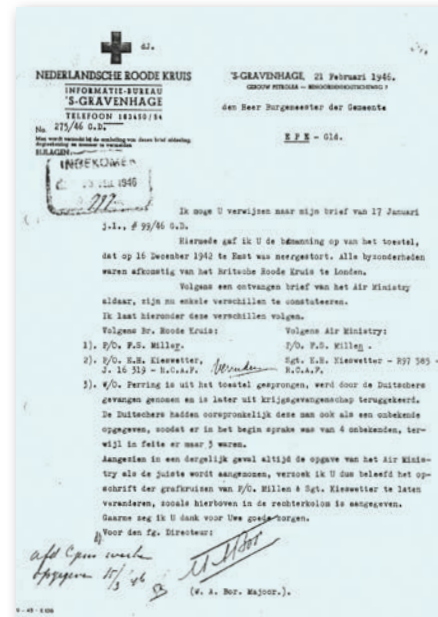
The graves of T for Tommy's crew at the Municipal Cemetery of Epe.



George Hutton's grave shortly after the war.



P/O Kiewwetter's grave inscription reads: 'Deep in our hearts, a memory is kept, of one we loved, and will never forget'.



Letter from the Red Cross about the right inscriptions on the graves.



The cenotaph in Marwayne, Canada, shows the name of Russell Holmes.



**Air Gunners' statements**

In answer to the question from the schoolchildren whether they were afraid, the Air Gunners invariably replied that they were absolutely terrified: "We were scared to death." They felt like this just before departure but once they were underway, they were doing their job. The question of whether they had lost family or friends during the war, always yielded a moment of silence. There

*To Kosterstraat School, Vaassen, Holland*

On many occasions while flying over Holland in darkness, we thought of those people down below us. Only their bravery and resilience kept them going, and after meeting their offspring fifty years later, we know our efforts were not in vain. Here's wishing Dutch youngsters a wonderful future with an everlasting peace on Earth. God bless them all.

Vliegend over Holland in duisternis gleden onze gedachten vaak uit naar de mensen daar beneden. Met dapperheid en vasthoudendheid wisten ze te volharden. En nu, na vijftig jaar, ontmoeten we hun nakomelingen en weten dat onze moeite niet tevergeefs is geweest. Wij wensen de Nederlandse jongeren een mooie toekomst en een eeuwigdurende vrede op aarde. God zegene hen alle.

Bill Philip McFarlane  
Don Anderson-Mill House

100 Squadron  
RCAF  
1942-1945

was never anyone who could deny this ... One of the statements from an Air Gunner was "Only birds and fools fly but only fools fly by night." Another Air Gunner said: "After the death of a family member who served in the RAF, I had to promise my mum I would not become a pilot. I kept that promise; I became an Air Gunner." At one of the memorial services a gunner told us: "It's a bigger honour for us to lay a wreath here in Gortel than one in London."

**Aircraft recovery in the Netherlands**

Many aircraft came down over the Netherlands, as the territory was in the flight path of the main targets in Germany. Years after the war, when the polders in the IJsselmeer were drained, a large number of wreckages were found in the mud. These were recovered by the Recovery Team of the Royal Netherlands Air Force (RNAF) under the supervision of G.J. Zwanenburg. At first removals were handled rather haphazardly. The main priority was to remove any explosives and the aircraft wreckage. However, people were so concentrated on removing the dangerous material, they had little regard for anything else.

One Lancaster was identified as DS794 of No. 427 (RCAF) Squadron which crashed on February 15th/16th 1944. In addition to finding the aircraft and bombs, human remains of some of the crew members were also found. Following this incident it was realized that recoveries would have to be handled with great care. During the sixties and seventies many crew members were identified and as a result of this they were put to rest in a recognized grave.

Many of whom were 'Missing believed killed in action', but not knowing what had happened to a loved one was worse than knowing that they were dead and resting peacefully.



Fire-extinguisher of a Stirling, recovered in the Flevopolder, 1972.

**The Lancaster bomber**

The Avro Lancaster is one of the most widely used and successful heavy bombers in the Second World War. In fact, this was the best bomber of the RAF. This four-engined aircraft, developed from the lighter Manchester bomber, was commissioned in early 1942; a total of 7,378 were built. The aircraft had a range of 2784 kilometers and could carry 5443 kilo's of bombs. The maximum speed was 462 km / h; the maximum service ceiling 5790 meters. The crew consisted of seven men. The armament consisted of eight 0.303 inch machine guns; two in the nose turret; two in the dorsal turret and four in the tail turret. Some Lancasters also had a belly turret with a machine gun. One of the most famous bombing raids, carried out by a Lancaster, was the bombing of No. 617 Squadron in May 1943 at the dams on the Mohne, Eder and Sorpe which eliminated a large part of the German war industry for a while. Of the nineteen Lancasters deployed, eight didn't return.



**Dedication**

They shall not grow old,  
as we who are left grow old.  
Age shall not weary them

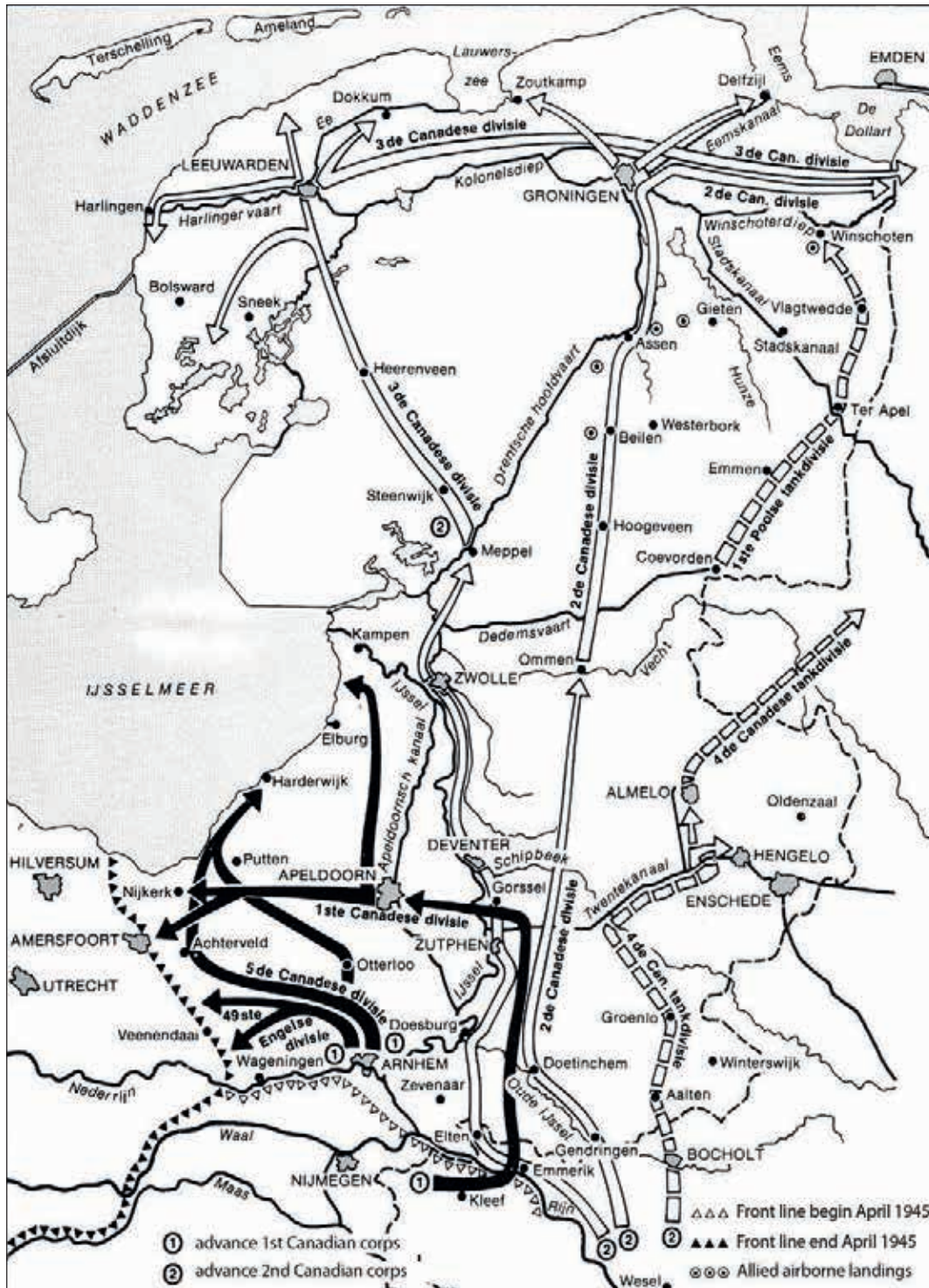
nor the years condemn.  
And at the going down of the sun  
and in the morning  
we will remember them

**Poppy Day**

A wreath of poppies is not much to ask  
For those who lie beneath Earth's mask,  
In foreign fields so far from home  
Their precious land no more to roam.  
One day a year when medals are worn,  
Yesterday's hero stands alone.  
All flags are lowered in slow salute,  
As veterans pay their own tribute  
To comrades of their youthful years  
They proudly stand and shed sad tears  
For valiant men who grew not old  
Their acts of courage go untold.  
So when autumn leaves begin to fall  
**REMEMBER** those heroes one and all.







Source: Ch. Whiting / W. Trees Van Dolsse Dinsdag tot Bevrijding, ons langste oorlogsjaar. Unieboek Bussum, 1977.

## Liberated by the Canadians

On 8th February 1945 Operation Veritable was launched. The Canadians and the British wanted to advance towards the Rhine near Kleve from Groesbeek. More than 1,000 guns released more than 500,000 shells on the ten-kilometer-wide front line. Nearly two thousand aircraft were used to bomb Cleves and Goch. After three days the British arrived in Cleves and on 17th February Goch fell into Allied hands. The British and the Canadians lost 15,600 soldiers during the heavy fighting in the rain and mud. On 10th March, Operation Veritable shut down; The Allies were on the Rhine, but many Rhine bridges had been destroyed by the Germans. On 11th March, the Allies managed to cross the Rhine at Hönnepele.

While the Americans and the British advanced towards the east, the first Canadian Army approached the east of the Netherlands. The IJssel river was crossed at several places, with the use of pontoon bridges. Arnhem was conquered by the Germans. A fierce battle was underway in Deventer. There was also heavy fighting at the Veluwe in Putten and Nijkerk. The whole of Veluwe was liberated on 19th April.



Crossing the IJssel river.

The second Canadian army moved on to Friesland, Drenthe and Groningen. 700 French paratroopers landed in Drenthe to occupy bridges and to create confusion among the Germans. In the city of Groningen large parts of the town were destroyed during a fierce four day battle. The men of the 2nd Canadian Division had to conquer each district and each bridge one at a time. In Delfzijl the Germans resisted even longer. Finally on 2nd May, the Germans in Delfzijl surrendered.



The city of Groningen after the battle.