

ME846 Family

April 2011 Newsletter



In early April 2011 Paul Stevenson and Howard Heeley travelled over to Belgium to meet with the various people who have been investigating the possible crash site of Lancaster ME846, which we first reported on in Autumn 2010.

Thanks to the organisation of our long standing friend Kamiel Mertens a meeting venue was arranged in a splendid room at the Postel Abbey. The meeting was generously hosted by the Archivist from Postel Abbey, Father Ivo Billiaert who made everyone really welcome; provided an excellent lunch in the Abbey café and who joined us through out the day's meetings and site visit.



Koen Peters the amateur historian who located the possible crash site was present; as was our old friend Wim Govaerts, who represented the Belgian Aviation History Association (BAHA). Wim was later joined by Cynrick De Deckker the Chairman of the BAHA.

Various points were discussed concerning the crash site, including details of the land ownership; how certain everyone was that the crash site was likely to be ME846; the protocols required to pursue the investigation further; and identification of other possible aircraft crashes in the locality.

In particular this related to Halifax DK170 (76 Sqn – RAF Linton-on-Ouse) lost on 11/12 June 1943 on an Op to Dusseldorf.

Several fresh avenues of research both in the UK and Canada were also identified; some of which are already being pursued. Some concerns still exist surrounding the bomb load of ME846, which was outbound to its target when it was shot down. Not least was the fact that ME846 was carrying a 4,000lb 'cookie'; a type that is known to be unstable and could have caused the crater that we later visited.

Whilst conventional bombs are normally more stable and may not have been armed before the aircraft crashed; but nevertheless they could still be in the area around the crash site.

Koen Peters advised that there were two main areas that he suggested investigating; these are approx 100m apart and this included the crater. He showed everyone the items that he'd already found around the site through metal detecting and walking around the forest.



After lunch in the Gasthof "De Beiaard" at the Abbey we drove to the ME846 Memorial, where a wreath was laid and a prayer was said by Father Ivo Billiaert. The wording of the prayer was as follows:

“Father, who loves us, hear our prayer. We have a double request: First give peace to the lost pilot. He probably offered his own life by saving his crew. But such you know Father, and our second request: Lend and send a well-equipped angel – so that we find what we are looking for; at the same time he has to be a good diplomat in order to simplify all requirements and attitudes of the complicated administration. We are thinking about the family and the friends of the pilot and the crew. Thank you Father for the help, in the name of Jesus Christ Our Lord.”



After a short moment of reflection we then travelled on the short distance to the forest location of the crash site. As we approached the site there was a depression in the track way where Koen Peters had found some aircraft related items. We then moved across to the main crater in the woods.

This measured 14 metres in diameter by approximately 4 metres deep. Some additional excavation work had been done in the centre of the crater by the Forestry people to create a water sump to aid fire fighting. It is difficult to convey the size of the crater from photographs, but is a really sizeable hole in the forest floor, which we believe may have been created by the explosion of the ‘cookie’ bomb.



As second location was also visited close by, where Koen Peters had recovered additional aircraft related items and further small metal items were still visible on the surface. After further discussions amongst the group everyone returned to the Abbey for further discussions.



Eventually it was agreed members of the BAHA would undertake a one day survey (at a weekend) of the area around the crater, which would include metal detectors and a magnetometer survey, with possible top soil investigation.

A date for this investigation has now been agreed for June 2011 and should any human remains be found the Belgian military does have a unit that would become involved and is equipped to deal with the recovery in an appropriate manner.

The ME846 Family would like to place on record their thanks to the people in Belgium for their wonderful friendship, co-operation and hospitality.

Pictured below from left to right are:
Father Ivo Billiaert; Kamiel Mertens; Cynrick De Deckker; Wim Govaerts; Paul Stevenson; and Koen Peters.



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