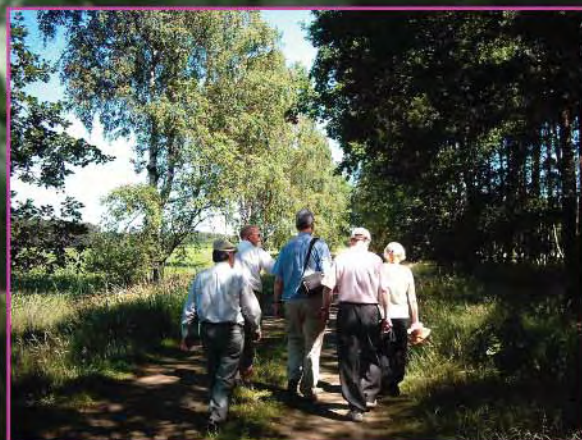


UNVEILING THE PLAQUE

In Celebration of the Belgian People
and the Crew of Lancaster 1- ME846
619 Squadron



MOL-Postel, Sunday, September 3, 2006 at 11 a.m

September 3, 2006

By Marjan Kieपुरa & Jane Knox-Kieपुरa

In Honour of the Crew of 619 Squadron Lancaster 1 – ME846 and the ME846 Family

Today's celebration marks a unique chapter in the history of our "ME846 FAMILY".

On June 11th 2005 we gathered together to unveil a Plaque at the Newark Air Museum, formerly RAF Winthorpe, where the crew had trained together. This memorable and historic event forged the bonds between us and we resolved to pursue our search for the plane and Pilot Officer M A H Davis, whose remains were never found.

What happened on the night of June 21/22 1944 under the skies of the summer solstice is slowly emerging. The long buried secrets in the Postel pine forests are revealing themselves like the exquisite flower that bloomed in the possible crash site. It is also the beauty of the human spirit that flourished in this region. This was witnessed especially by Peter Knox, a young man of 20 years who was hidden by many brave souls.

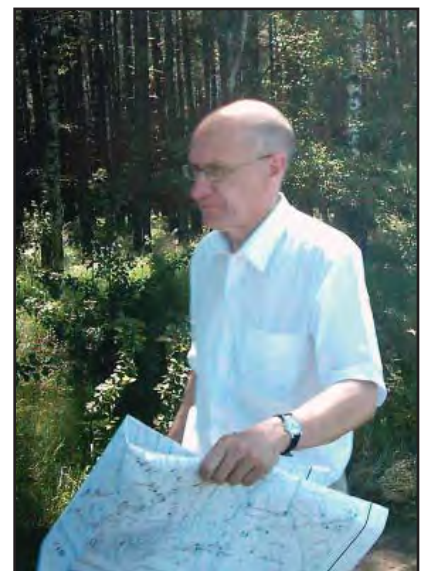
It is never enough to say "thank you" but in the following pages we hope that this story of sacrifice, courage, bravery and human goodness will do honour to all those who risked their lives in the name of justice and freedom.

We want to thank the Lord Mayor of Mol, Paul Rotthier, for making September 3, 2006 possible and the city of Mol for commissioning the monument to the crew of Lancaster 1.



Left to Right: Paul Rotthier, Frankie Vermierdt, Josepha Vermierdt-Aerts, Lea Vermierdt-Berghmans, Jane Knox-Kieपुरa, Alfons Vermierdt, Kamiel Mertens
Standing behind Alfons: Paul Knox and Marjan Kieपुरa.
Photo taken in front of Postel Abbey June 19, 2005

The Lord Mayor of Mol, Paul Rotthier, has been hard at work searching for answers and we would like to first of all thank him on behalf of all of us here today.



Lord Mayor of Mol, Paul Rotthier

ME846 Family – 1944 to 2006

by Jane Knox-Kiepura

In attempting to chronicle the events that took place in this region from June to September 1944, I have relied on the help and research of Kamiel Mertens. Kamiel has worked tirelessly using his substantial archival resources and knowledge to help co-ordinate all available data from both primary and secondary sources.

Kamiel Mertens was the inspiration and co-ordinator behind our visit to this area last year which enabled us to meet and learn more about those who had played such an important role in my father's shelter and escape. We particularly want to thank Kamiel for introducing us to the Lord Mayor of Mol, Paul Rotthier who has made this day possible.

Kamiel Mertens has shown his dedication and commitment in our search for answers on the fate of Captain Davis and Lancaster I – ME846. It was through Kamiel's well documented book: "Balen tijdens de tweede wereldoorlog (2004)" (trans: Balen during WWII) that we were in touch. It was after Alfonse Vermierdt wrote asking him if he knew what had become of Peter Knox that Kamiel got in contact with me, Now almost two years later, we are gathered here today to honour all those brave souls.

Kamiel Mertens, who studied social and library sciences considers himself an amateur historian and writer. His commitment and enthusiasm for our project has certainly allowed all of us involved and no doubt many future researchers to better understand the role the region of Postel/Mol played in the lives of so many airmen.

We also particularly want to mention Kamiel's friends and colleagues at STUDIUM GENERALE vzw especially Dr. Johan Claes, as well as Rene Geukens, Jan Slegers and Maria Wils. Thank you Kamiel.

As it is difficult to put all the names and events in strictly chronological or alphabetical order, we are starting with the crew themselves. This is followed by the individuals and families who were instrumental in assuring my father's safety and survival after he hit Belgian soil at approximately 1.30 a. bst on June 22, 1944.

Kamiel Mertens



Kamiel Mertens taken on June 19, 2005 near the crash site.



Kamiel and Dr. Johan Claes

A NEPHEW'S STORY

On September 3rd 2006, my wife and I will be in Belgium to visit what is thought to be the last resting place of my uncle, Pilot Officer Mark Anthony Hamilton Davis RAF, or Dave as he was known to the crew of Lancaster ME846, which was shot down in the early hours of June 22nd 1944.

Four of the crew managed to parachute to safety that night as Dave held the crippled plane steady. Unfortunately the upper and rear gunners failed to escape and the fully loaded aircraft blew up close to the ground. The bodies of the two gunners were recovered and eventually buried at the Schoonselhof Cemetery near Antwerp, but my uncle's body has never been found and it was not until recently that I learned of the site, in the woods north of Postel Abbey, where it is thought he now rests.

For me this will be the end of a quest that has lasted many years and I am so very grateful to the Belgian people who have located the site and made my visit, and that of some of the families and friends of the crew, possible. I must specifically mention Kamiel Mertens and the Lord Mayor of Mol, Mr Paul Rotthier, for their enthusiasm and dedication in making all the arrangements, for without their invaluable help, this visit would not have been possible.

But on September 3rd we will not only be remembering Dave and his crew. We should and will remember all those gallant Belgians who risked their lives in helping airmen who had been shot down to return home. Many "home runs" were successfully made with their assistance, including Peter Knox, the bomb aimer from Dave's Lancaster. We should never forget their dedication in the face of the enemy, for it endangered not only their own lives, but those of their families as well. So I look forward to our meeting with immense anticipation, when I too can say, thank you.

However, it is now over 60 years since the aircraft was shot down and memories fade with time. The site at present identified as the crash site may possibly not be correct as so many aircraft came down in this area during the war. There is another known crash site a few kilometres north just across the border into Holland that may be where Dave lies. We probably will never know the exact location, but September 3rd will bring me closer to him than ever before and I am therefore grateful to those Belgian people who have made this possible.

But this weekend in Belgium would not have taken place without the enthusiasm and dedication of Jane Knox-Kiepora and her husband, Marjan. For the past three years, Jane has been the catalyst that has brought us together and on behalf of everyone involved, I would like to thank Jane and Marjan for all the arrangements that have made this weekend such a great success.

Paul M Stevenson
Nephew of Pilot Officer MAH Davis



Paul Stevenson (nephew of Captain Davis), Christine Cardose, Marjan Kiepora & Gill Stevenson. Paul Knox in background.



Paul Stevenson

A NIECE'S STORY

As children, my sister Alison and I grew up avidly listening to my mum, Vera, tell us of her childhood in Bearpark in Durham where she grew up with her beloved brother Dennis, and their mum, my grandma, Dorothy. We heard of their pride as Dennis grew up and joined the RAF, and of his precious time spent with them on leave- and ,of course, his abiding comradeship and friendship with his fellow crew members of the Lancaster, especially Peter Knox and Porky Bowering. Mum remembers the day he asked my grandma if two crew members, one from Australia, the other from Canada, could come to Bearpark on leave as it was too far for them to go home. The answer was a firm 'yes', and so the journey of memories began.

Good memories- socialising at Durham ice rink, sitting by the fire at Kingston Avenue looking at the 'Picture post' with Porky, whilst Pete sat with grandma by the fire, discussing world events and village life! Worrying times when they were shot down- and relief when they heard that Pete and Dennis were safe- devastation at the news that their dear friend Porky had died.

Mum often spoke of Pete's dad, Errol, (Brig. Sir Errol Knox) who had called to Bearpark to visit the family to say thank you for looking after Pete. She knew that there was a connection with journalism in the form of the paper 'The Argus' in Australia- and many years later I was to look up the name on the internet, went into the website- and lo and behold, there was a picture of my Uncle Dennis, and the crew whom I felt I knew so well from the talks I'd had with my mum. Also an email address- Jane Knox Kiepura. The rest, as they say, is history!

My mum, grandma, Dennis and the boys could never have dreamt that we would all meet one day and become so close, and more importantly, come full circle, back to the place where the plane came down. Especially poignant for Paul Stevenson, whose uncle bravely fought to keep the plane steady, and whose body has not been found.

This will evoke many feelings- of sadness for those who paid the ultimate price so that we can be here today as free people. Immense gratitude to those who helped as part of the resistance- but most of all a sense of belonging to a part of history which has a personal place in all our hearts.

Some friends and family know that one of my favourite films is 'It's a Wonderful life'!!

Those who know the film will remember Clarence the angel saying to George Bailey - 'You've been given a great gift George- a chance to see what the world would be like without you'. I think we know that the world would have been a sadder place without the lives memories of those seven young men of the Lancaster 619 squadron. Clarence also received his wings in the film- the crew certainly earned their wings in life, and they are all, I'm sure watching us today and smiling.



In front of 4 Kingston Avenue, Bearpark - former Belshaw home.

l to r: Jane Knox-Kiepura, Chris Cardose, Monica Knox,
Vera (nee Belshaw) and John Wright

Chris Cardose
Niece of Dennis Belshaw July 2006



THE CREW AT RAF WINTHORPE

1661 Conversion Unit, in early March 1944 in front of their Short's Stirling.

This was the first station where all the crew first flew together.

From left to right

Flight Sergeant, Peter Edmund Knox – A418433 RAAF – Bomb Aimer
 Sergeant, Thomas. A. Newbery – 1602063 RAF – Wireless Operator
 Sergeant, W. Dennis "Geordie" Belshaw – 1808996 RAF – Flight Engineer
 Pilot Officer, Mark Anthony Hamilton "Dave" Davis – 174023 RAFVR – Pilot
 Flight Sergeant, Leslie E. J. "Tag" Taylor – 1585057 RAF – Navigator
 Sergeant, George Harry Moggridge – 1896779 RAFVR - Mid-Upper Gunner
 Pilot Officer, John Ernest Ralph "Porky" Bowering – J/88199 RCAF – Rear Gunner

Lancaster Plaque Unveiling

"In Celebration of the Crew of Lancaster ME846"

On Saturday 11th June 2005 a Plaque was unveiled in our Exhibition Hall in the memory of the crew of a crashed Lancaster 1 - ME846, PG-C from 619 Squadron at Dunholme Lodge in Lincolnshire.

Following training in March 1944 on Short Stirlings at 1661 HCU RAF Winthorpe the crew were posted to 619 Squadron. Whilst on their eighth mission on the night of 21st / 22nd June 1944 at approximately 01.20 hours BST, their Lancaster was hit by ground fire and subsequently crashed east of Postel in Belgium, near the border with Holland. The pilot, Pilot Officer M A H Davis remained at the controls throughout, allowing four members of the crew to bail out successfully, but he, together with the Rear Gunner, Pilot Officer J E R Bowering and the Mid-Upper Gunner, Sergeant G H Moggridge did not survive the incident. The two gunners are buried at the Schoonselhof Cemetery in Antwerp, Belgium, unfortunately the remains of the pilot and the aircraft have never been found.

Forty-six friends and family were present at the unveiling ceremony including two who had travelled from Canada, two from the USA and two widows of crew-members from the Lancaster. The Reverend Norman Taylor made a dedication to the plaque; he is the son of the navigator, Flight Sergeant Leslie Taylor.

Production of the plaque and the arrangements for the ceremony were organised by Paul Stevenson who is the nephew of Pilot Officer Anthony Davis [who was known by his crew as Dave]. In the evening Marjan and Jane Knox-Kiepora hosted a buffet-dinner at the Grange Hotel in Newark for the day's participants, Jane being the daughter of the bomb aimer Flight Sergeant Peter Knox.

As part of her quest to locate the aircraft and the remains of Pilot Officer Anthony Davis, Jane Knox-Kiepora and her husband Marjan were travelling on to Belgium to meet Kamiel Mertens, who is assisting their search for the missing aircraft.

The only crew-member not represented at the ceremony was the Wireless Operator Sergeant Thomas A Newbery [1602063 RAF] and everyone involved in the events surrounding the Plaque unveiling is keen to hear from anyone who can help locate Sergeant Newbery or any of his relatives. Details can be passed on via the museum.

"The Plaque Unveiling illustrates the important link that the museum provides to the wartime era of RAF Winthorpe and 1661 HCU", commented Museum Trustee, Howard Heeley. He continued, "I felt privileged to be part of such an emotional event and I was heartened to witness the strong bonds that exist between the families of the aircraft's crew". He concluded, "Hopefully the museum can help with the search to locate the remains of Pilot Officer Anthony Davis and to perhaps establish some form of contact with either Sergeant Newbery or his relatives".

Howard Heeley 2005



SERGEANT, W. DENNIS “GEORDIE” BELSHAW

1808996 RAF – Flight Engineer



Belshaw Family from l to r Vera, Dennis, wife Lettie,
Anne - mother, and niece Christine Cardose



Dennis was born on October 8th, 1923, in Ladysmith Terrace, Ushaw Moor, Durham, the only son of Dorothy and Arthur Belshaw. He had an older sister, Dorothy, who sadly died at the age of eight, when Dennis was six, and a younger sister, Vera, who was born not long after Dorothy's death. His father died when he was eight years old, and the family moved to Bearpark.

He left school at 14 years of age and was a delivery boy for a local shop, until starting work in the store at 16, with a view to eventually training as a manager. He joined the RAF in 1941 at the age of 18, and received his wings in 1943. He and the crew flew many sorties together, until that fateful day in June when they were shot down over Belgium. After initially receiving help from the resistance, Dennis was eventually captured, and was a POW in Stalag Luft 3 until the end of the war.

On being demobbed, Dennis undertook a government training programme in place for returning men and women, and he chose to become a painter and decorator, eventually becoming a sales executive in later years. He married Lettie just after the war, and they had an only daughter, Anne. They also had two grandchildren, Richard and Elizabeth, to whom Dennis was to speak of his time in the war, the only time he did so in any detail. Dennis sadly died in his late sixties.

PILOT OFFICER, JOHN ERNEST RALPH “PORKY” BOWERING

J/88199 RCAF – Rear Gunner



Flight Sergeant John Ernest Ralph “Porky” Bowering - Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF)

From Kingston, Ontario Canada

Attended: Kingston Collegiate and Vocational High School

On Lancaster 1 Registration ME846 Code PG-C took off from Dunholme Lodge June 21 1944.

Shot down over Belgium, June 22 1944 (KIA) - Bladel Woods, Nr. Postel.

He now rests in Schoonselhof Cemetery, Antwerp Plot IVA, Row F Grave 17

The following inscription is on Porky’s grave:

“To those who loved him, he will always live”

In memory of “Porky” his brother, Clifford Bowering used his column space in the Kingston Whig Standard to publish John McCrae’s “In Flander’s Fields” every November 11 – Remembrance Day.

It is Clifford’s son, Chris Bowering, who has been actively involved in preserving his uncle’s memory.

PILOT OFFICER, MARK ANTHONY HAMILTON “DAVE” DAVIS

174023 RAFVR – Pilot



Mark Anthony Hamilton Davis, Born - July 19th 1923

Fifth and youngest child of John Frederick Davis and Martha May Davis (nee Hamilton)

Educated at King Edwards School, Birmingham (1931 - 1939)

1941 - Joined the RAF Volunteer Reserve

Jun. 1942 - Called up and given the rank of Leading Aircraftman

Aug. 1942 - Sent to Canada for training

29th November 1942 – At No 34 EFTS, Assiniboia, Saskatchewan, Canada

22nd January 1943 – At No 35 SFTS, North Battleford, Saskatchewan, Canada

Jun. 1943 - Awarded his wings at North Battleford, Saskatchewan, Canada

Jun. 1943 - Promoted to Flight Sergeant

Aug. 1943 - Posted to RAF Silverstone flying Wellingtons, forming the nucleus of a bomber crew

Jan. 1944 - Posted to RAF Scampton for ground training

Mar. 1944 - Posted to RAF Winthorpe, 1661 conversion unit, flying Stirlings, finally recruiting the remaining two crew members

Apr. 1944 - Posted to RAF Syerston to convert to Lancasters,

May 1944 – Squadron posting to RAF Dunholme Lodge – 619 Squadron

May 1944 - Promoted to Pilot Officer

Died - 22nd Jun 1944 – Body never recovered

On Lancaster 1 ME 846 took off from Dunholme Lodge June 21 1944.

Shot down over Belgium, June 22 1944 - Bladel Woods, Nr. Postel

Pilot Officer Davis was killed, his body never recovered. He is commemorated on panel 211 of the Runnymede Memorial.

Brother of Dudley Hamilton Davis also known as “Dave” with 61 Squadron (shot down 1940) whose exploit of parachuting from 50 feet is explained in Chapter 5 of the book: “Into the Silk” written by Ian Mackersey.

FLIGHT SERGEANT, PETER EDMUND KNOX

A418433 RAAF – Bomb Aimer



Flight Sergeant Peter Edmund Knox (RAAF)

Only son of Brig. Sir Errol and Lady Knox (nee Coore) two sisters Patricia and Pamela.

Born: Sydney Australia November 16, 1923

Educated: Xavier College Melbourne

Melbourne University, Newman College BA

28th later 29th Course - Initial Training Centre

No. 2 Air Observers School, Mount Gambier. Further training: Port Pirie - South Australia,

Number 1 Air Navigation School, Nhill, Victoria. Trained in Avro Ansons

Sailed May 5 1943 Matson liner - Sydney to San Francisco.

Disembarked Oakland 22 May 1943. Further Training at Camp Myles Standish, Mass. USA

June 30, 1943 - Parade - March Past US Army Commander.

June 30-July 1 1943 - sailed on Queen Mary troop ship via Forth of Clyde disembarked Greenock, train to Brighton.

Further training at Penrhos, Turweston, Silverstone, Scampton, Winthorpe, Syerstone.

Flight Sergeant Peter Knox 619 Squadron - part of Bomber Command's Five Group

On Lancaster 1 - Registration ME846 Code PG-C took off from Dunholme Lodge June 21 1944.

Shot down over Belgium and escaped with the help of the Belgium Resistance.

Peter Knox married Monica Newcombe November 17 1945 in Melbourne Australia

They had nine children: Caroline, Jane, Christopher (dec'd), Elizabeth, Anne, Edmund, Kate, Paul and Louisa

Peter Knox died on May 21 1998 in Kent United Kingdom

SERGEANT, GEORGE HARRY MOGGRIDGE

1896779 RAFVR - Mid-Upper Gunner



Sergeant George Moggridge - 19 - Mid Upper Gunner from Dagenham Essex-Royal Air Force. George Harry Moggridge was born on 20th December 1924, in Mile End, London. His father, George Percy Moggridge, worked in the London Docks. His mother's name was Clara. As a boy he loved anything to do with aircraft and flying, "He always had a model aeroplane in his hands". He was also a keen member of the Boy Scouts. At family "sing songs" around the piano the scouting song "Riding Along on the Crest of a Wave" was his favourite. Not surprisingly as a much-loved son, George was called "Sonny" in the family.

He had two older sisters (Mabel and Violet); exact whereabouts unknown, but it is known that Violet married an American -Jim Rolf who worked for the Ford Motor Company in Dagenham.

We believe his last civilian address was 99 Lillechurch Road Dagenham where he lived with his parents until he joined the RAF. He was unmarried.

On Lancaster 1 Registration ME846 Code PG-C took off from Dunholme Lodge June 21 1944. Shot down over Belgium, June 22 1944 (KIA) - Bladel Woods, Nr. Postel. He now rests in Schoonselhof Cemetery, Antwerp Plot IVA , Row F Grave 16 having been brought there from nearby Deurne.

When Peter Knox arrived back in England 1944 he visited the Moggridge and Newbery families in Barking Essex. The families had become friends. George Moggridge's memory has been kept alive by his cousin Gerald Moggridge who kindly contributed the above information. This was given to him by Aunt "Peggy" who remembers George as a youngster.

SERGEANT, THOMAS ALFRED NEWBERY

1602063 RAF –Wireless Operator



Sergeant Thomas Alfred Newbery –Wireless Operator from Chadwell Heath, Dagenham, Essex – Royal Air Force.

Thomas Alfred Newbery was born on March 5th 1923 at Isleworth, Middlesex and his birth was registered in the Brentford District. His father Edward Alfred Newbery was listed as being a railway line keeper and his mother's maiden name was Waters.

Having joined the Royal Air Force Thomas Newbery was part of a crew that trained on Short Stirlings with 1661 Heavy Conversion Unit [HCU] at RAF Winthorpe, Notts before transferring to 619 Squadron at RAF Dunholme Lodge, part of Five Group RAF Bomber Command.

Flying on Lancaster 1 – Registration ME846 Code PG-C that took off from RAF Dunholme Lodge on June 21st 1944 and the aircraft was shot down by a German night-fighter over Belgium. Sergeant Newbery is believed to have been the last person to bale out of the crashing aircraft and he landed in a tree possibly damaging his arm. He was captured by the Germans and became a Prisoner of War in Stalag Luft III and was repatriated to England at the end of the war.

On August 17th 1946 aged 23 Thomas A Newbery [Editorial Clerk] married Jean Spears aged 19 [Typist] of 24 Bernard Street, Lincoln at All Saints Parish Church Lincoln. On the Marriage Certificate Thomas Newbery's father was listed as a decorator living at 16 Freshwater Road, Dagenham and Jean Spears' father was listed as an Engineer living at 24 Bernard Street, Lincoln.

Thomas and Jean are believed to have briefly lived in Dagenham [perhaps at No.1 Dunkeld Road, Dagenham, Essex]. Sadly Thomas became ill and he and Jean moved back to Lincoln to live with the Spears family on Bernard Street.

Aged just 26, Thomas Newbery died on July 5th 1950, at 24 Bernard Street, Lincoln; of Hodgkin's disease. The death was reported by his father in law Mr Spears and on the Death Certificate Thomas Newbery's occupation was listed as "Publishers Advertisement Compiler". Thomas was buried on July 8th in the Spear's family grave at St Swithin's Cemetery, Washingborough Road, Lincoln, 1950, plot C17.

FLIGHT SERGEANT, LESLIE E. J. "TAG" TAYLOR

1585057 RAF – Navigator



Leslie and Eileen Taylor's Golden Wedding Anniversary July 1996
with their sons Alan, Norman, Simon and daughter Hilary



Leslie Edwin James Taylor was born in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire on 10th October 1922.

He joined the Royal Air Force as a volunteer after his elder brother, Norman, was killed in action. He was in RAF 114 Squadron and stationed at Horsham St Faith in Norfolk. He was flying in Blenheim Mk4s and took part in many secret sweeps over France. He was killed in his aircraft on April 28th 1941 while it was returning from a shipping patrol over the North Sea.

Leslie Taylor trained as a navigator with Royal Air Force - 619 Squadron, part of Bomber Command's Five Group.

On Lancaster 1 ME 846 took off from Dunholme Lodge June 21 1944.
Shot down over Belgium June 22 1944 was captured and made POW at Stalag Luft III.

He was later made a Warrant Officer when he was repatriated in 1945.

He married Eileen Davis on 23rd July 1946. There are four children: Norman, Alan, Simon and Hilary.

Leslie (or 'Tag' as he was known to the crew) trained as a teacher and began a career which spanned thirty years, the last ten of which he was Headmaster. Sadly he had to retire in 1978 at the age of 55 because of ill health.

His courage and determination helped him to carry on with life in a limited fashion and he and Eileen happily reached their Golden Wedding in 1996.

Leslie died on 9th July 2001, just two weeks before his 55th Wedding Anniversary.

Memories of June 11th 2005 at Newark Air Museum and The Grange Hotel, Newark, Nottinghamshire UK



Family and friends of the Crew ME846. See list on last page.



Eileen Taylor (widow of Leslie Taylor) & Monica Knox



Paul Knox, Chris Cardose & her husband Chris



Neil Webster, Marjan and Jane being shown RCAF documents by Chris Bowering.

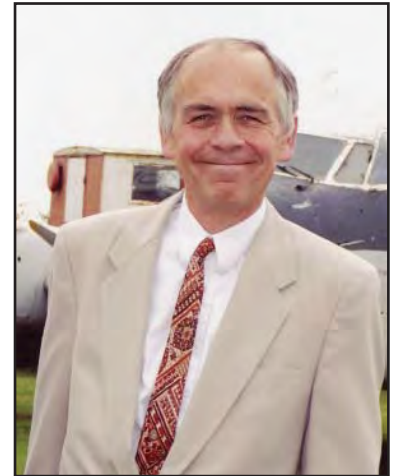


Eleanor Moffatt, Marjan, Phil Knox, Louisa Knox

On the Airfield at the Newark Air Museum



L to R Monica Knox (widow of Peter Knox), Jane Knox-Kiepura (daughter of Peter Knox) representing Sergeant Thomas Newbery. Chris Cardose (niece of Dennis Belshaw), Paul Stevenson, Eileen Taylor (widow of Leslie Taylor), Gerald Moggridge (cousin of George Moggridge), Chris Bowering (nephew of "Porky" Bowering).
Photo taken on June 11, 2005 Newark Air Museum.



Edmund Knox



Louisa Knox & Anne Fane (nee Knox)



Alex & Jerome Knox



Alex, Michael with Granny Knox



Chris Grant and Richard Fane (on right)



Paul Stevenson in the Dambuster Room giving a briefing prior to unveiling of the Plaque



L to R : Sarah Taylor and husband Rev. Norman Taylor, standing behind Richard Craven-Smith-Milnes, his wife Jane and Howard Healey with camera.



Jane Knox-Kiepura enjoying cocktails at the Grange following unveiling of the Plaque



Marjan Kiepura raising a glass to the crew at the Grange Dinner on June 11th 2005 - watching him is James Stevenson, gt nephew of Captain Davis.



Colin and Christine Thomas (nee Moggridge) with Claire and Gerald Moggridge



Family of F/S Leslie Taylor - enjoying dinner at the Grange June 11 2005.



Gill Stevenson and son Robert

Peter Knox in Belgium – June – September 1944

June 21 1944 was a very busy night over the skies of Belgium. It was the shortest night of the year and many lives were to change. This was true of the many casualties that night but it was also true for the crew of Lancaster ME846 when at 01.20 BST it was hit by ground fire. Peter Knox wrote, *"The starboard engine was on fire and Captain Davis said in a calm, clipped voice "abandon aircraft-----emergency jump jump." We each had to confirm over the inter-com that we were jumping. As I had to lift up the escape hatch I responded first "air-bomber jumping". There was no shouting, no calls for help. In a numbed state, I moved into the escape routine...all this time the pilot was holding the plane steady."*

Captain Davis must have known his fate, in the face of death he made the greatest of all sacrifices; he kept the plane steady so that his crew could bail out. It is certainly one thing to be trained to do this but it takes the greatest act of heroism to make a life and death decision so that others can be saved. Captain Davis must never be forgotten by those who owe him their existence.

For Sgt. Peter Knox, RAAF, it was also going to become one of the most defining moments of his life because in facing the pulsating reality of death powerful forces are at work. As Peter Knox was to write fifty years later of his experience immediately on leaving the aircraft.

"This was an environment for which there had been no rehearsal. I was no longer responding like a robot to in-built commands. The disaster which had hit us struck me...then I recollect thanking God I had escaped and rather desperately willing that my mother and father should somehow know I was alive. Within a very short space of time I saw the explosion as our plane plummeted into the ground. I wondered if the others had got out and I shouted out the name of "George" (Moggridge). My voice seemed to be lost in the vast dark space around me and I realised there was no possibility of making any form of human contact."...it took some 15 minutes to reach the ground...I passed through some clouds and hit the ground on the fringe of a pine forest. My parachute was snagged on a small tree. Luck was on my side. I was unhurt. The weather was fine. It was dark and I was in an isolated area."



Pine Forest in Postel – Photo June 19, 2005



Marjan Kiepura inspecting possible crash site.

Written by Peter Knox 1995
With contributions by Kamiel Mertens
Edited by Jane Knox-Kiepura.

From this moment on Peter Knox followed the instructions given in those hours of drill. He got out his emergency pack, compass, knife, iron rations and water purification tablets. He then hid his parachute and any identifying clothing in a small hollow and piled pine needles on top. As instructed, he headed west following a track, there were houses nearby. He wrote: "After an hour or two I came to a canal. There was a lock and barges tied up to the bank. Since this was the shortest night of the year, it was getting close to dawn and I was tired. I found a deep hollow on a hillock overlooking the lock and decided to make that my hiding place for the day...only one person saw me a young schoolboy out for a ramble. He gave me a friendly smile and fed. He obviously did not report me because no one else came remotely close...there was no telling the most likely spot to fall into friendly hands...I knew that I only had rations for two or three days..I stuck to my plan of walking west..crossing the canal became a challenge and, besides, I needed water..as dusk settled I summed up courage and walked to the lock...I watched until the keeper was well away from the little foot bridge on the rim of the lock and moved quickly across it...once clear of the lock I scrambled down the bank.



When it was completely dark, I set off along a track which looked reasonably deserted and kept walking away from the canal. All was quiet and I was able to skirt any houses that I saw. At the first light of dawn I came to a main road with fields on the other side. As I crossed it a group of cyclists came into sight. They looked like

workers heading for a factory. When they passed me, one of them wheeled his bicycle around, stared and then re-joined the others. I just put my head down and kept walking.

I realised that I had to find a hiding place for the day now that people were up and about. The lane I was in forked left and right and I remember thinking that this could be a decisive choice. I went left and after a few minutes saw a hedgerow bisecting a field. Because it was midsummer the hedgerow was in full leaf. I found a place with a little hollow, well hidden from view. I still had some of my rations left and do not recollect feeling hungry. It was still dry and warm. The shoes made from the cut down flying boots were feece lined and my feet were sweating. I took my shoes off and hung up my socks on an inside branch to give them some air. I felt reasonably secure for the day and snatched some sleep.

At some time in the middle of the day I heard a dog barking and within a few minutes it had unearthed me. A man, presumably the farmer, pushed aside the leaves. (See Alfonse Vermierdt below) He was clearly not a German and I knew that the moment had come to identify myself. I said in French that I was "aviateur anglais" and he and the dog very quickly disappeared. There was nothing I could do except wait, hope and pray that he was a Dutch or Belgian patriot. I still did not know on which side of the border I had landed.



June 18, 2005

Alfonse Vermierdt – the boy with the dog who found Peter Knox in this field behind their home in Reysberg (June 1944). With Jane Knox-Kiepura (inset).



Paul Knox – son of Peter Knox.
June 18, 2005



Alfonse Vermierdt with his dog Johnnie and parents Jozef Vermierdt, his mother Julia Vermierdt-Kemps and his grandmother Theresia Kemps-Dierckx. 1944

It was close to evening when I heard voices and two men approached me. (KM: This most likely to be the Cools brothers, who were members of the Balen-Resistance. They went to the Vermierdt family home in Reysberg to look after PEK-who then moved him to a stable in the meadows on the other side of the village - Schoorheide-Malou, where he stayed for 24 hours).

I again used my schoolboy French to explain who I was. This was a tense moment for them as well as for me. If they were going to hand me over to the Germans I would lose my freedom. If I was a German posing as an English airman to infiltrate the underground movement they stood to lose their lives. They said they were friends and told me to follow them at a distance of 50 yards or so. There was no other conversation. I obeyed their instructions and we wandered through more lanes to a farm. They pointed to a barn with a hay loft and told me to wait there. I went up a ladder and lay down in the hay. Before long another man came back with some food. He spoke some English and now the interrogation began. We were both nervous. In the event of being captured, our instructions were to tell the German interrogators nothing except our "name, rank and number." On the other hand we had been told that if we were lucky enough to be picked up by the Resistance movement they would have to establish our credentials and ask very direct questions to verify we were genuinely from an RAF plane. They would also want this type of information so that they could compare it to replies received from any other members of the crew they might pick up. This would help them confirm they were dealing with genuine airmen. I was asked for the number of the squadron, the airport from which we had left, the name of the pilot, the target, the type of plane and its engines, when and how we had been shot down. I was plied with questions about England and asked to name the latest popular songs. I accepted that I truly was in the hands of the underground movement and provided answers to all the questions.

I was grateful for one thing, the interrogator did not ask to see my "dog tags", the metal discs we wore around our necks with such basic information as name and blood group. I had taken a shower before getting into my flying gear and had left these identification markers back in a squadron bathroom.

I slept well that night in the hay. The human contact had been reassuring and I felt that there was nothing I could do except to follow the instructions I received from the people who had found me. They brought me more food in the morning—both meals were of omelettes and fried potatoes as I recall and some form of warm drink. They tasted good. I think that I must have relaxed after the tension of the previous three days because I have only a hazy memory of my movements in the next day or two.

I saw only the person bringing me food and rested and slept. I imagine, in retrospect, that someone was vetting my answers and planning what to do with me.

*I was moved away from the farm and taken to the middle of a small pine forest to be held in isolation for two or three more days. My minder was a youngish man who spoke some English. **This was Col. Victor Neels - see separate page.***

I knew now that I was in the Flemish speaking part of Belgium close to the border with Holland but little else. I was given a blanket and a waterproof sheet and food was brought to me a couple of times a day. I used the waterproof sheeting to make a type of tent under some branches and must have spent most of the time keeping out of sight. Not that I recall seeing any strangers. I do remember that there was a tremendous thunderstorm. The rain took a long time to penetrate the pines. I thought that I was lucky until I found that the water kept dripping off the lower branches for hours after the storm had passed on its way. (KM - Victor Neels had taken Peter Knox to Iemert - to the home of Neel's aunt Mrs. Josephine Gombeer who married Leo Timmermans where Knox was hidden in the woods, in a place where there were also escaped Russian POW's. Four days later Neels took Peter Knox to Mrs. Jeanne Leemans-Schlesser in Geel.)

Within a week of being shot down I was accepted as a valid RAF escaper and on 26 June 1944. I was brought into direct contact with the Resistance movement. I was provided with a bicycle—the prime means of transport in this part of petrol starved occupied Europe—and escorted to a house in a nearby town. It was strange, and not a little frightening, to be back among people. I think I expected to see German soldiers lurking behind every doorway. It was all very humdrum, at least on the surface. People were walking about the streets, talking on corners. I saw no one in uniform.

*Inside the house I met a middle-aged woman who was a central figure in the underground movement. (KM Mrs. Jeanne (Leemans)-Schlesser - born in Dinant, Belgium - She was arrested in the summer of 1944 and sent to prisoner of war camp-see above). She told me I was to be held on a nearby farm before being taken south to Brussels. I learned that I had been shot down over Balen-Neet (**this was incorrect information**) in Belgium and that I was now in Geel. She said that travel had become very difficult since the invasion of Europe and because*



Visit to Col. Neels Aunt Josephine Timmermans-Gombeer at home in Leopoldsburg (Immert) June 18 2005 l to r: Raf Timmermans, Anna Neels-Voss, Maria Timmermans-Henrickx, Francois Timmermans, Col. Victor Neels. Sitting in front Josephine Timmermans-Gombeer



L to R Kamiel Mertens, Jane Knox-Kiepura, Paul Knox, Mrs. Anna Neels-Voss, and Col. Victor Neels. June 18 2005



Marjan Kiepura and Col. Victor Neels at the Postelsche Hofstee Restaurant, Reuselseweg, Mol Postel-June 19 2005

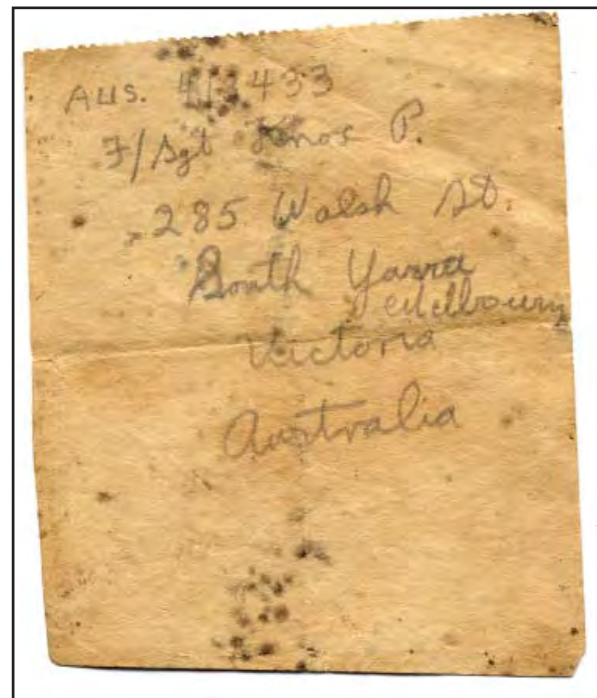
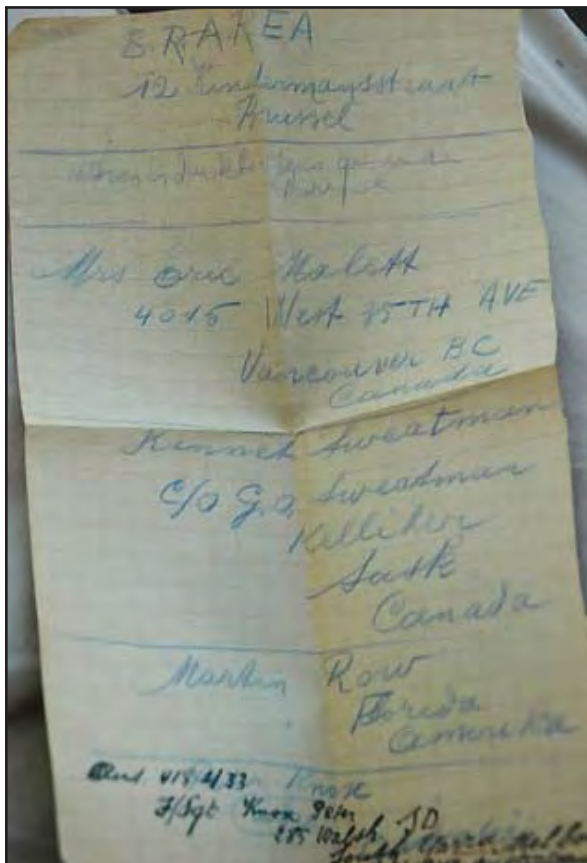


Photo taken of Peter Knox by
Resistance in 1944
Provided by Col. Neels.



of the allied bombings of all forms of transport. Then I was introduced to the two people who were to accompany me to the farm. They were in fact the farmer's son and daughter, Jules and Dimpna Sterckx. It was all very efficient and brisk. I was to learn after the War that, tragically, this good woman (Mrs. Leemans) who helped over 100 airmen to escape was denounced to the Germans, and taken to one of the prison camps. For the Belgians it was very high risk work.

Jules, who was about my age, and his younger sister were the children of Flemish farmers. They had to escort me through streets where they were known. It was the first time they had undertaken such a mission and it was a feat of great courage on their part as I was obviously a foreigner to this region. Many dangers existed for them.



Our journey to the farm from the town was made on bicycles. I followed my two guides at a respectable distance and we passed into the countryside without problems. It was a very flat open area and in many of the fields corn was growing. I recall crossing a small dyke and then we

came up to the farm building. I was taken inside and introduced to the farmer, Frans Sterckx, his wife, Maria Clementina Sterckx-Heyns and Marcel Maes, Dimpna's fiancé. I was also delighted to find out that there was another RAF man being held on the farm. He was a Flight-Sergeant navigator, Reg Brookes, also aged about 20, who had been shot down at the end of March returning from a raid on Nürnberg in Germany. (F/S R. Brookes= 100 Squadron, Lancaster 1 LL887 HW-H from Grimsby, crashed on Dutch/Belgium border April 22-23 1944 - shot down on op to Düsseldorf.) He had been in hiding in different places and had only recently come to the farm. The family protecting us spoke no English but we were able to communicate in French, mainly with Jules and Marcel.

The farm was to be our base for the whole month of July and the first part of August. We were held there while the great battles around Normandy were being waged. The escape route for airmen through France was blocked and there was little the underground movement could do except to put us in a safe haven until the Allied forces liberated the occupied territories. This was a dangerous enough exercise for those involved. We were told that the Germans made repeated sweeps of the Belgian countryside looking for young Belgians to draft into labour gangs. If allied airmen had been found on a farm the results would have been disastrous for the farmer and his family. We not only had to be kept hidden from the Germans, it was also essential that we be kept out of sight of other farmers. This was an area of small-holdings and it was a major problem to keep two tallish men out of sight of prying eyes.

A small recess had been built inside a pile of bricks stacked against the rear of the farm building. We had to crawl through a small opening into this recess. It was then bricked up again. Inside was a mattress and little else. Reg and I spent our nights there sleeping head to toe. Ventilation came from spaces left between the unevenly heaped bricks. It was an effective hiding place and occasionally--presumably if there was fear of a German raid--we were joined in it by Jules. That made it a tight squeeze.

(Picture of Hoge Hof - Liesel. Artist: Frans Aldelhof from the original by Herman Tonnaer.



During the day we had two hiding places. One was in a broad hedgerow. There was space in the centre for quite a cosy little nook. We had room to lie down, sit up or crawl around. I cannot recall feeling cramped. The second hiding place was in the centre of one of the fields of corn. The farmer had cut out a small square and there we had more freedom to move around since the corn was at its full height and we were reasonably out of sight if we stood up with a stoop. Both Reg and I were fit and of fairly even temperament. There was no friction between us even in such close proximity.

In the dark of the evening we were able to take some exercise, walking up and down in the vicinity of the farm house. Clearly we had to follow the advice of the farmer and his family as to where we spent the day and when we could approach the house in the evening. Then we could talk with them, have the occasional wash and use their lavatory. The house was blacked out and the farm dogs would bark if any strangers were approaching. We also had meals with the family at night. They were most generous in the food they gave us. Because it was a farm there were a lot of eggs and I recall a pig being killed for meat, this had to be done in secret because the Germans kept a tight grip on all food and requisitioned grain and animals to supply their forces and home markets.



Frans Sterckx and his wife Maria Clementina Sterckx-Heyns

Fortunately the Germans did not approach the farm house while we were there. We were, however, very close to an airfield and we used to see German planes taking off and landing. Sometimes they flew directly over us as we squatted in the patch in the corn field and we would have to take cover in the crops. We could not identify the planes which were small but not frontline fighters. They looked to be military observation aircraft. Whatever they were, they looked sinister to us and we dived out of sight. (KM - most likely the German military base of Diest-Schaffen, some 20 kilometers S.E. of Geel)



Above Peter Knox with Dimpna Sterckx in cornfield. Below complete photo with Reg Brookes



L to R Frans Sterckx, Jules Sterckx, Marcel Maes, Rev. Constant Hannes, Peter Knox, Dimpna Sterckx, Alfons Sterckx and Maria Clementina Sterckx-Heysen.



Jules Sterckx and Peter Knox

We passed the day talking, sleeping and playing endless games of cards. The family had some 52 card packs and we taught one another the games we knew. Chinese and Miss Milligan were favourites. We discussed our families and our upbringing and what we planned to do after the War. We tried to learn a little Flemish from a grammar book but not very seriously. We did, however, pick up the words of Lilie Marlene which was the popular song of the moment. Our main contact was with Jules. He gave us news about the progress of the war. Generally we were in a state of limbo and one day drifted into another. The weather remained mainly fine and warm but one night there was a tremendous thunder storm. We all gathered in the main room of the farm house. I sensed that as farmers living close to nature there was genuine fear of the lightning and thunder which seemed to be all around us. No damage was done and the crops survived.

As the summer progressed the corn had to be harvested. We were gradually losing our most secure cover. Somewhere in the Resistance movement the decision was taken that we would have to be moved. The family must have been relieved but they did not in any sense hustle us out. We were taken in to their main room and given a drink when one of the underground workers came to tell us the plans. When the day came for us to go, they all gathered bravely outside the house to bid us farewell.



Peter Knox and Marcel Maes



Peter Knox and
Jules Sterckx

Turnhout and Brussels

Our move was from the countryside to a nearby town, Turnhout, and we had to make the journey of several miles on bicycles. Our guide was a young priest. (It is not clear based on updated 2006 information whether Brookes and Knox travelled together). Dimpna Maes Sterckx recalls that it was her brother Jules who escorted them on bikes. Reg Brookes recalls that Jules took him-some of the way but that Knox followed separately as the height of the two men would make them obvious).

Fortunately the country through which we passed was flat. The muscles in our legs were in poor condition after the six weeks of inactivity and pedaling the bikes was hard work. We were taken by back routes and had to cross a canal using a footbridge by a lock. A few minutes before we arrived at the lock we saw RAF fighter planes diving down to attack barge traffic

on the canal. We could see people gathering by the lock and the priest decided it was too dangerous to proceed. We turned back and took a different route feeling rather relieved that we had not been at the lock a few minutes earlier and shot at by our own planes.

Turnhout was a fair sized town and it was a strange experience to be riding through streets with people shopping and going about their business. The priest took us to the house (JK-80 Kwakkelstraat) where we were to be held for a few days before being taken to Brussels. Care was taken about our entry. The woman who was to look after us had a flat on the second or third floor of the house. We had to get rid of the bikes and get through the front door as quickly and as casually as possible.

Our new minder was in her late 30s or early 40s. She was quite tall and on the thin side. (KM -Mrs. Zosine Emilienne Verstraeten neé Lafli). Her husband was a soldier in the Belgian army (François Verstraeten) and had been made a prisoner of war. A city woman, she was intelligent, kind and had a good sense of humour. She was a fluent French speaker, although Turnhout was very much a Flemish town. Reg and I were told that our stay in Turnhout was to be short and that we would be moved to Brussels as soon as the necessary arrangements could be made. We never ventured out into the street but could move freely around the flat which had two bedrooms and a sitting room.

It was decided that we should move singly to Brussels and after a very few days Reg left. I followed a couple of days later. During that time two US airmen were brought into the town by the underground. They knew no French and I had to translate a message to them prepared by one of the Resistance people. I cannot recall much of the text but I do recall that it urged them to be patient and explained what was being done for them. Subsequently I met them for a few minutes. They were gunners from a Flying Fortress which had been shot down a few days previously and were having trouble in coming to terms with their predicament because of communication difficulties. I was able to reassure them that they were in good hands but could do little for one of the pair who said that "my dawgs (feet) are killing me." He had been given a pair of shoes that were far too small for him. (Probably Captain Henry Griffis and Sgt Daniel Cargile shown as having stayed at Kwakkelstraat at same time as Peter Knox).

The trip to Brussels via Antwerp was my first contact with people outside the narrow circle of the Resistance friends. A middle aged man escorted me by train. I huddled by the window and he sat beside me so that no one could talk to me--we were in one of those trains with little compartments with long interfacing benches each holding five or six people. The train became quite crowded but the journey was uneventful. There were no searches, no inspectors and no talkative neighbours. At one point we halted in the countryside close to a German



military camp and I could see the soldiers moving around. It was my first real sighting of Germans in person, other than the pilots we used to see in their planes when they flew over the farm.

In Brussels I was taken from the station to a cafe and there I was handed over to another man to be taken by bus to the house in the heart of the city where we were to be held. There I was reunited with Reg who had also made the transfer safely. This did not always happen. After Brussels was liberated and we were freed I spoke to an RAF man who had travelled like me to Brussels from Antwerp. His escort, a middle aged man, had handed him over to the Germans. Fortunately for him the Germans left him behind when the Allied armies entered Brussels. The escort must have been a spy who worked for both sides. I have often wondered if we had shared the same escort and I had been one of those he passed along the underground chain to sustain his credibility as a Resistance fighter. Certainly the description fitted.

On the morning of 4 September it was clear that the Germans had withdrawn and the city was about to be liberated. The streets were thronged with people and Reg and I joined them early on.

We stood in the main avenue as the tanks and armoured cars of a Guards Regiment drove in. It was a wonderfully happy scene and we joined in the chorus of welcome, cheering and waving at the soldiers. When they stopped and took up positions by the roadside we had a word with them. It was all

very disciplined. At one point a rumour swept the town that there had been an armistice and the war was over. People danced and sung. The Guards officers ordered their men to stay by their vehicles and not to join in the celebrations. Soon the rumour subsided and we had the reassuring sight of the troops "brewing up".

Reg and I were anxious to find someone to report to. We were directed to an area on the outskirts of the town which the RAF had taken over. Light planes were using it as a landing strip. We trailed out there hoping to hitch a lift back to England. The sentries told us this was forbidden and that the Army would look after us. It had a section detailed to round up people like ourselves. Clearly they had to be careful. We were dressed in civilian clothes and could have been spies or saboteurs. The city, though jubilant, was tense. There were many frightened people who had collaborated with the Germans.

By the next day the British Army was in full command of the city and had requisitioned the main hotels. It was not long before we were directed to a reception centre and made contact with the military personnel with responsibility for looking after escaping prisoners of war. Airmen like Reg and I who had been shot down and evaded capture and, presumably, agents and spies and others with a call on Allied protection. After some form of preliminary vetting we were accepted as genuine and given a room in a leading hotel. We were fed and one of the officers kindly gave us champagne taken from German stores. Other airmen straggled in but none that I knew. (According to Reg Brookes May 31 2006 - this was the Metropole Hotel in Brussels).

In the lobby of the hotel late in the evening I saw a war correspondent with Australian flashes on his shoulder. I asked him if he knew whether there was anybody from my father's paper, the Melbourne Argus. The next morning I managed to find Geoff Hutton, an old friend. It was quite an emotional moment because I thought that now I could let my parents know that I was alive and well. In fact, it was not as easy as it seemed. There were strict rules on the release of information about anyone who was officially a "casualty". The news that I was alive would eventually arrive on the desk of the Melbourne Argus early on Saturday morning 9 September. My mother and father were at their Woodend weekend home 50 miles outside Melbourne. The sub-editor on duty woke them up with the news. I don't think there was much sleep in Woodend that night.

So it was also for the rest of us. We married, had families, and got jobs. The War became an increasingly distant episode in our lives. I never joined any RAAF or RAF associations and in the 50 years since the War finished I have only discussed my own personal experiences when specifically asked or, occasionally, when I have met by chance someone who served in the RAF. This has not been because of any reluctance to recall the past but rather because the stories of old soldiers, sailors and airmen tend to become rather repetitive and boring. So these memoirs have not been written to entertain but just to tell as factually as possible my personal wartime experience in Bomber Command as I have been able to recall it half a century later.

On November 17, 1945 Peter Knox married Monica Newcombe an English WREN at Newman College Chapel, Melbourne University.

Peter Knox ©1995

Peter Knox-RAAF and Monica Newcombe WREN Wedding Day November 17, 1945 Melbourne, Australia



Wedding of Peter Knox RAAF and Monica Newcombe WREN - behind from left to right: Norm Jarvis (see picture of Australian Bomb Aimers) Peter Murphy and Pamela Knox, sister of Peter Knox. Monica Newcombe flanked by WRENS. Marriage took place at Newman College Chapel, Melbourne University, November 17th 1945. Monica Newcombe had been sent to Australia on troop ship on active duty with the Women's Royal Navy.

Brevet as shown on left lapel on Peter Knox's uniform. Returned 60 years later to Knox family. Brevet was sole source of identification of RAAF uniform remaining, after plane shot down on June 22 1944. Knox had hidden his uniform in the pine forest. Returned by Neil Webster.



On the morning of 4 September it was clear that the Germans had withdrawn and the city was about to be liberated. The streets were thronged with people and Reg and I joined them early on. We stood in the main avenue as the tanks and armoured cars of a Guards Regiment drove in. It was a wonderfully happy scene and we joined in the chorus of welcome, cheering and waving at the soldiers. When they stopped and took up positions by the roadside we had a word with them. It was all very disciplined. At one point a rumour swept the town that there had been an armistice and the war was over. People danced and sung. The Guards officers ordered their men to stay by their vehicles and not to join in the celebrations.

For Reg and I and the other airmen in the hotel there was a wait of a day or two before arrangements could be made to get us back to England. The RAF would not fly us back from Brussels and we had to be transported by Army trucks to Paris. We joined a long convoy of vehicles on a rather wearisome journey. We were all, I think, suffering a reaction from the euphoria of the preceding days.

We spent a night in Paris and then we were flown in a Dakota of RAF Transport Command to an airport somewhere on the outskirts of south London. The pilot had a nervous bunch of passengers. For all 30 or so of us our previous flight had ended with a parachute jump. For the RAF men it was a homecoming. For me it was a stop on the way back to Australia.

This is the conclusion of Peter Knox in Belgium June - September 1944

ENGLAND AND RETURN TO AUSTRALIA

I spent several days in London going through the process of being re-incorporated into the RAAF. It was all very matter of fact and routine. There was no such thing as counselling. I had to have a basic medical, collect my mail and recover my own effects. It was an eerie experience going out to Uxbridge; I think it was, to a building where all the possessions of missing airmen were held. It was a soulless, depressing place with row after row of cubicles holding kitbags, uniforms and the few personal belongings we carted around with us. In London, I was briefed on the fate of the crew. The navigator (Taylor), wireless operator (Newbery) and flight engineer (Belshaw) were all prisoners of war. The pilot (Davis) and the two gunners (Moggridge and Bowering) were now listed as "missing believed killed." I also learned that our squadron had been decimated on the night we were shot down. Half the planes had not come back. The official records show that it was a disastrous operation for the RAF as a whole. A total of 127 Lancasters were sent on the raid and 41 were lost, about a third. It was the highest percentage loss suffered by Lancasters in one night during the three years in which they operated (March 1942 to May 1945). Equally sadly the RAAF records showed that by September, eight of the nine other Australian bomb-aimers I had trained with had been shot down. Some were prisoners of war. Others had disappeared with their crews.

During his time in England he visited the families of the British crew members. He was able to visit the relatives of the Canadian crew Member "Porky" Bowering on his return trip to Australia.

Peter Knox wrote of one incident which "remains fixed in my memory. As I sat in the underground train heading for Richmond I noticed that the man opposite me had exactly the same mannerisms and an uncanny likeness to an RAF pilot who had skippered one of the crews which had trained with us. His name was Woods and he was a close friend of our pilot. I knew he had been shot down. Finally I asked my travelling companion his name and explained the reason. The pilot was his brother who was missing believed killed. He was delighted to talk to someone who could speak about his brother and we spent an hour or two in a bar close to Richmond station.

Epilogue: Peter Knox wrote: "Immediately the War was over, I established contact with Jules, the son of the Belgian farmer who had harboured me, and with the lady from Turnhout. Jules was interested in emigrating to Australia and my father offered to help him. He never came. He went to the Belgian Congo and was tragically killed in a motor car accident in Kenya in 1957. His sister Dimpna and Marcel married. Our kind friend from Turnhout (Mrs. Verstraeten) was reunited with her husband and her letters indicated she had settled back into normal domestic life."



Royal Australian Air Force - Bomb Aimers 115 A stationed at Penrhos Wales 1943

Back row: left to right: Sgt. Peter Knox, P/O Keith Steinbeck, P/O Lyle Bowes, Sgt. Joe Millmot, Sgt. Pierre Burge **Front row: left to right:** Sgt. Charlie Kroschel, Sgt. Norm Jarvis, P/O Bert Tyne, Sgt. Stan Black, Sgt. Norm Page



Squadron Leader Dudley Hamilton Davis 61 Squadron (see Chapter 5 book "Into the Silk" by Ian Mackersey). Davis was brother of Pilot Officer Mark Anthony Hamilton Davis.

Sgt. Jacky Moffatt -born in Edinburgh
Scotland, May 9, 1923 -
166 Squadron May 21/22 1944 Lancaster III ND956 AS-1- Operation
Duisburg Took off at 22.35 from Kirmington. Killed in action –Crashed
at Goudriaan (Zuid-Holland), 10 km NNW of Gorinchem Those who lost
their lives are buried in Goudriaan General Cemetery.
F/S T G Franklin - kia
Sgt J F Tomney –(Flight Engineer) pow
Sgt B F Bird –(Navigator) pow
Sgt S D Spencer RCAF –kia
Sgt J Kiltie – kia
Sgt A A Anderson RCAF – kia
Sgt Jacky Moffatt -kia
Jacky is uncle of Philomena Knox (nee Moffatt) Great Uncle to
Alexander, Jerome and Michael Knox. Beloved brother of
Stephen Moffatt and Rev. Vincent Moffatt.



THE STERCKX FAMILY OF HOGE HOF - GEEL-LIESEL

The Sterckx family lived at Hoge Hof in Geel from 1934 until 1963. They were farmers.
Below is a picture of Frans Sterckx (1877-1977) and his wife Maria Clementina Heyns (1887-1977).
From book by Jules Heyns "*Gelenaars van alle tijden*".



Peter Knox was brought to their farmhouse in at the end of June 1944 by Mrs. Leemans – the local resistance contact. He joined F/S Reginald Brooks, 100 Squadron, Lancaster 1 LL887 HW-H who had been shot down in April 22/23 1944.

The children Jules Sterckx (1922-1957) and Dimpna Sterckx (born 1926) lived in the farm and were the two guides along with Marcel Maes, a neighbour who was Dimpna's f ancé.
There was a younger brother Alfons (b.1927)

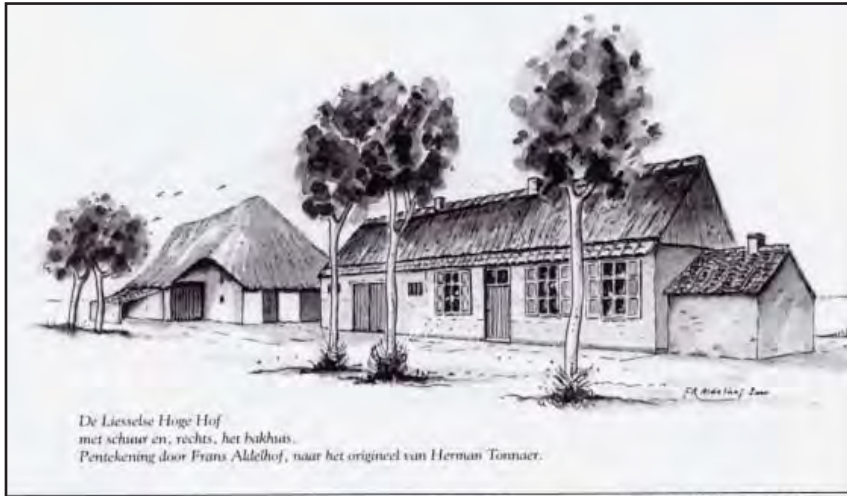


Father Constant Hannes (from St. Aloysius College in Geel (b. October 1901 died 9th May 1962) visited Peter Knox at Hoge Hof and according to PEK he accompanied him by bicycle to Turnout.

The Pictures below were taken on June 18th 2005.



The pictures below were taken on June 18th 2005.



Janssen Pharmaceutica, a Johnson & Johnson company is now in the original site of the Hoge Hof farm and can be seen in the distance across the Canal.

Drawing of the “Hoge Hof” as published in “Gelenaars van Alle Tijden”, Geel, 2000, Article by Jules Heyns: “De laatste bewoners van de Hoge Hof in Liesel”. Frans Aldelhof, after the original by Herman Tonnaer.



Paul Knox, Dimpna Maes Sterckx, Jane Knox-Kiepora, Jules Heyns, Alfons Sterckx



Kamiel Mertens, Luc Sterckx, Frans Maes, Dimpna Maes-Sterckx, Jan Maes, Jules Heyns-Cools, Alfons Sterckx



L to R Jan, Frans, Dimpna, Jules Heyns, Luc, Alfons, Kamiel, Jane & Paul. Meeting up in Geel. June 18th 2005



Marie Christine, Jan, Frans, Dimpna, Paul & Jane

Airmen Hidden by Colonel Victor Neels Secret Army 1940-1944

listed in same order as in “*Balen tijdens de tweede wereldoorlog*” –
S G Studium General vzw Balen 2004 by Kamiel Mertens

Flemish people, cited in the rescue-reports book-Kamiel Mertens, pp 425-428;
All members of the local resistance group of Balen

The following group of people were involved in the Balen Resistance Group
(*This list is not complete*)

Neels Vic(tor) Commander of Balen-resistance

Aerts Alois - Member Balen Resistance

Cools Albert - Member Balen-resistance

Cools Jef (Jozef) – idem – his brother

De Groof Frans - Member Balen Resistance

Diels Gust (Gustaaf) – Member Balen Resistance

Strubbe Raymond - Young schoolteacher, Member Balen Resistance; 1944:
in communal administration Balen: able to provide false documents

Theunis Alfons – Member Balen Resistance

De Keyzer Albert- Unknown – perhaps local who found airman.(see Mallett)

Name in Red bold italics indicated airman hidden by Col Neels and the Balen Resistance Group. However,
there were many others involved in the various stages of the aircraft crash and subsequent escape route back.

Flight Sergeant Philip Tweedy DFM - 635 Sqn Lancaster III ND819 F2-M

Op. Duisburg t/o 2249 21-22 May 1944 from Downham Market - Crashed at Luijksgestel (Noord-Brabant) near
the Dutch/Belgian border. (Per W R Chorley: F/S Tweedy had served with 76 Squadron, details of his DFM
having been published on 14 September 1943, he had flown with Norwegian, Lt E. Sandberg.

The following on the aircraft were KIA:

Sgt E J Rowlands RAF, (he rests in Nederweert War Cemetery,

F/S M B Rumbles RAF -, F/S L J Making RAF; F/S A A Jepson RCAF, (these three buried at Eindhoven General
Cemetery); W/O G A D Mould (commemorated on panel 214 Runnymede Memorial).

W/O J A Porter, RAF, pow.

Flight Sergeant, Peter Edmund Knox RAAF - 619 Sqn Lancaster 1 – ME846 PG-C Op. Wesseling

T/o 23.01 21-22 June 1944 from Dunholme Lodge -

Others on Aircraft

Sergeant, Thomas. A. Newbery – 1602063 RAF – Wireless Operator/pow

Sergeant, W. Dennis “Geordie” Belshaw – 1808996 RAF – Flight Engineer/pow after being hidden at first

Pilot Officer, Mark Anthony Hamilton “Dave” Davis – 174023 RAFVR – Pilot missing believed kia – Name appears
Runnymede Memorial Panel 211.

Flight Sergeant, Leslie E. J. “Tagger” Taylor – 1585057 RAF – Navigator/pow

Sergeant, George Harry Moggridge – 1896779 RAFVR - Mid-Upper Gunner/kia

Pilot Officer, John Ernest Ralph “Porky” Bowering – J/88199 RCAF – Rear Gunner kia

W/O Kenneth C Sweatman RCAF -424 Sqn Halifax III HX313 QB-B

Op: Bourg-Leopold T/o 23.45 27-28 May 1944 from Skipton-on-Swale - crashed at Oostham-Langven (Limburg), 6 km WSW of Leopoldsborg, Belgium.

Through Col. Neels we see that Kenneth Sweatman came from Kelliher Street, Saskatchewan Canada.

Further details given by **Kamiel Mertens** for Sweatman showing sources:

Crash in Olmen-Germeer (near Balen) after the bombardment of May 1944 of the Camp of Beverlo (Leopoldsborg) "cared for by Alfons Theunis (local resistance), during 1 night (medical care, food, bed...) Passed to Neels, (accompanied by Frans De Groof); transport to Balen, 7 days with Neels, and transport to Mrs Leemans-Geel.

Crash and rescue documented in the book of Frans Smolders: "Olmen tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog" and his book: "The last fight of the Blonde Bomber" 1992; and in the study-project of the youngster Bram Dierckx "Terug naar de basis" = Back-to-base": Escape-routes for allied airman to Britain". 2004-2005

Also on above aircraft - Killed: F/O R A Irwin RCAF; Sgt W G Wakely, RCAF; Sgt G F Freeman' RCAF; Funeral services for the three who died were held on 30th May at St-Truiden; their remains have since been taken to Heverlee War Cemetery.

F/O W J Elliott RCAF, evd; Sgt M Muir RAF, evd; F/S Poppa RCAF, pow;

F/L Mallett, RCAF, evd; (with Sweatman)

F/L B L Mallett RCAF - 424 Sqn Halifax III HX313 QB-B Op: Bourg-Leopold T/o 2345 - see Sweatman above - same aircraft

27-28 May 1944 from Skipton-on-Swale - crashed at Oostham-Langven (Limburg), 6 km WSW of Leopoldsborg, Belgium.

Navy - Roy O. Martin from Homestead Florida - USA

Air gunner: John White from New York (19 or 20 years) USA

F/O E A Drake RAF - 619 Sqn -Lancaster I LL784 PG-M Op: Aachen T/o 2043 Coningsby 11-12 April 1944 - Drake and Baker (below) blown from aircraft as it exploded. Those who died laid to rest on 14th April at Eindhoven (Woensel) General Cemetery

F/O Alfred Kenneth Baker RAF - - 619 Sqn Lancaster I LL784 PG-M Op: Aachen T/o 2043 Coningsby 11-12 April 1944 -(see Drake above)

Killed on this aircraft:

S/L J W E D McGilvray DFC

Sgt I R F Haberfeld

P/O J L Pritchard

Sgt R. Hillier

W/O A A Munro DFM

F/S Arthur M. Rae - RAF 76 Sqn Halifax III MZ623 MP-P Op. Aachen T/o 2241 24-25 May 1944 from Holme-on-Spalding Moor. Crashed at Aendonk (Antwerp) 9 km E. of Turnhout.

Also on aircraft: W/O F Bishop RAF, pow; Sgt W T Mays RAF, pow; F/O T H Greer RAF, pow; F/S/ W Cliff RAF, pow; Sgt J Danes RAF, pow Sgt C. Cassidy RAF, pow;

After the war Albert Cools went to Africa (Belgian Congo), he died long ago;

His brother Jef (Jozef) Cools became a policeman, later adjunct-commissioner in Balen.

Where available others involved are cited elsewhere in this document.

The Balen Resistance Group helped many others but these are the names immediately available.

The Story of Zosine Lafili and the Belgian Resistance

Based on research by Kamiel Mertens

Written by: Jane Knox-Kiepora

All I knew about Zosine Lafili up until this year was that there was a Mr. and Mrs. Verstraeten of No. 80 Kwakkelstraat (now this house is No. 84) Turnhout who had hidden airmen in 1944. This I knew from an undated photograph of the couple in the family album and from my father's recollections written fifty years later. Here he described her as being "in her late 30s or early 40s. She was quite tall and on the thin side. Her husband was a soldier in the Belgian army and had been made a prisoner of war. A city woman, she was intelligent, kind and had a good sense of humour. She was a fluent French speaker, although Turnhout was very much a Flemish town..."

Kamiel Mertens decided to leave no stone unturned in his quest to find out what had become of Mrs. Verstraeten. He left a flyer in over 250 letter boxes on Kwakkelstraat (street) in the hope that somebody might have some recollection. A week later he was rewarded with a phone call from Mrs. Verstraeten's former neighbour. The neighbour had been a teenager in 1944 and remembers how she would see young airmen arriving through the back doors ("my nephews" according to Mrs. Verstraeten). She recognized the back of the house from the picture. With the knowledge this was the correct person and place - Kamiel was able to research the archives of the Town of Turnhout. He eventually found her full name - Zosine Emilienne Verstraeten-Lafili. Kamiel now got to work in all the historic and post war archives, document centres and Fund for Social Security (the actual name of an older institution "Ministerie van Wederopbouw" - a special Fund relating to the Resistance Movement established immediately after the war to reimburse and give official status as "members of the armed resistance" for the costs incurred for shelter, food, medical supplies, clothes, documentation, and transportation for the individuals they had rescued.

Zosine Emilienne Lafili was born in Leuven on 17th November 1902 to Jean-Gustave Lafili and Marie-Louise Willems. On July 22 1927 she married François Verstraeten (a military professional) in Leuven. We have not established yet when they moved to Turnhout. By May of 1940 Corporal Verstraeten, a soldier in the Belgian Army, was made a POW.

It would appear from the records, that Mrs. Verstraeten-Lafili was a housekeeper for a Turnhout family active in the resistance. They had rescued an airman (Kleinman) and asked her to hide him at her home in Kwakkelstraat 80. Upon further research it is undoubtedly the same Theodore Kleinman from the 349th Squadron who joined the 100th Group and who stated after his return "the bail-out occurred about 10 miles SSE of Turnhout, Belgium and continues: "After contacting an underground unit I was placed in a house in Turnhout...." (see notes available on web).

There is a listing that from February 4th 1944 till September 20th 1944 Zosine Verstraeten-Lafili hid at least twelve allied pilots and airmen. These included Lt T. Kleinman USA, Sgt. W. Lynch UK, F/O John Maunsell UK, Flt Lt E Mallet - Canada, F/S Reg Brookes UK, F/S Peter Knox Australia, Captain Henry Griffis USA Sgt Daniel M. Cargile USA, F/S Arthur Rae, Scotland UK, F/S Philip Tweedy, F/Sgt Roy Reading UK, Sgt Roy Martin USA.

As best as can be determined it is likely that these airmen were from following aircraft:

1) Lt. Theodore Harold Kleinman - 0 795 261 to be confirmed - possible 349th Sqn.

He was hidden from February 4 - March 27 1944. From Kwakkelstraat 80 via a "middle-man" R. Degroot living at Lindeplein 2 - Moerbeke-Waas in East Flanders

2) Sgt W. H. Lynch - 100 Sqn Lancaster I LL887 HW-H Op. Dusseldorf T/o 2246 Grimsby

22-23 Apr 1944 Believed to have crashed near the Belgian/Dutch frontier. According to W. R. Chorley's book "Royal Air Force Bomber Command Losses of the Second World War 1944" there is a Sgt W. Lynch who was "arrested while being hidden at Antwerp". This could well be the same Sgt Lynch- see also Reg Brookes.

Sgt Lynch was looked after by Mr. Leemans in Geel - husband of Mrs. Jeanne Leemans-Schlesser. Information to be confirmed.

A Sgt W. Lynch was hidden at Kwakkelstraat April 25 - April 30 1944

3) F/O John R. Maunsell - 57 Sqn Lancaster I LM115 DX-M Op. Wesseling T/o 2306 21-22 June from East Kirkby Crashed at Oud Turnhout (Antwerp) 3 km E. of Turnhout. Also on aircraft Killed F/O A F Bayley RAF; W/O T F Beecher RAAF; Sgt. J H Donovan RAF (buried at Schoonselhof Cemetery), Sgt R Hessman RAF pow; F/S Q D Naysmith evaded; Sgt V L Marshall, RCAF pow.

John Maunsell went to Mr. Martin (member of Resistance) - Ravelsche Steenweg 13 in Ravels
He was hidden at Kwakkelstraat from June 22 - July 12 1944

The following 10 airmen went from Turnhout to Brussels via Zosine Lafli and her Resistance colleague Albert Gever from MOL, to Mr. De Meyer No 2BB/16/111/22? - living at Victoriestraat 102 in Brussels. The airmen were handed over at the "Grande Place" in Laeken which is a suburb of Brussels (home of the Royal Castle).

1) F/L B L Mallett RCAF - 424 Sqn Halifax III HX313 QB-B Op: Bourg-Leopold T/o 2345
27-28 May 1944 from Skipton-on-Swale - crashed at Oostham-Langven (Limburg), 6 km WSW of Leopoldsburg, Belgium. (see Sweatman below)
He hid at Kwakkelstraat from July 14 - August 4 1944

2) WO2 K C Sweatman RCAF -424 Sqn Halifax III HX313 QB-B Op: Bourg-Leopold T/o 2345
27-28 May 1944 from Skipton-on-Swale - crashed at Oostham-Langven (Limburg), 6 km WSW of Leopoldsburg, Belgium he had been helped by Co. Neels earlier on
Also on aircraft - Killed: F/O R A Irwin RCAF, Sgt W G Wakely RCAF, Sgt G F Freeman RCAF
F/O W J Elliott RCAF evd, Sgt M Muir RAF evd F/S Poppa RCAF pow. Mallett (see above)
Funeral services for the three who died were held on 30th May at St-Truiden; their remains have since been taken to Heverlee War Cemetery.
He hid at Kwakkelstraat from July 14 - August 4 1944

3) F/S Reginald Brookes RAF - 100 Sqn Lancaster I LL887 HW-H Op. Dusseldorf T/o 2246
22-23 Apr 1944 from Grimsby, believed to have crashed near the Belgian/Dutch frontier. Note: Reg Brookes was hidden with Peter Knox by the Sterckx family in Geel prior to moving to Turnhout. Also on aircraft - Killed: P/O W H Shaw RAF, Sgt J Ensor, RAF, P/O G H Williams RAF (buried at Schoonselhof Cemetery). Sgt W H Lynch (see above), F/S K Morgan RAAF pow, Sgt R A Bacon, RAF pow.
He was hidden at Kwakkelstraat from August 10- August 11 1944

4) F/S Peter Knox RAAF - 619 Sqn. Lancaster I ME846 PG-C Op. Wesseling T/o 2301 21/22 June 1944
Also on aircraft: Sergeant, Thomas. A. Newbery – 1602063 RAF – Wireless Operator/pow
Sergeant, W. Dennis "Geordie" Belshaw – 1808996 RAF – Flight Engineer/pow after being hidden at first Pilot Officer, Mark Anthony Hamilton "Dave" Davis – 174023 RAFVR – Pilot killed; Flight Sergeant, Leslie E. J. "Tagger" Taylor – 1585057 RAF – Navigator/pow; Sergeant, George Harry Moggridge – 1896779 RAFVR - Mid-Upper Gunner/killed; Pilot Officer, John Ernest Ralph "Porky" Bowering - J/88199 RCAF – Rear Gunner/killed

He was hidden at Kwakkelstraat from August 11 - August 14 1944

5) Captain Henry Griffis (?) 0809589 USA - to be confirmed
He was hidden at Kwakkelstraat from August 12-August 14 1944

6) Sgt. Daniel Cargile 38372191 USA - to be confirmed
He was hidden at Kwakkelstraat from August 12-August 14 1944

7) F/S Arthur M. Rae - 76 Sqn Halifax III MZ623 MP-P Op. Aachen T/o 2241 24-25 May 1944 from Holme-on-Spalding Moor. Crashed at Arendonk (Antwerp) 9 km E. of Turnhout.
Also on aircraft: W/O F Bishop RAF, pow; Sgt W T Mays RAF, pow; F/O T H Greer RAF, pow; F/S/ W Cliff RAF, pow; Sgt J Danes RAF, pow Sgt C. Cassidy RAF, pow;

8) F/S Philip Tweedy DFM - 635 Sqn Lancaster III ND819 F2-M Op. Duisburg t/o 2249
21-22 May 1944 Downham Market - Crashed at Luijksgestel (Noord-Brabant) near the Dutch/Belgian border. (Per W R Chorley: F/S Tweedy had served with 76 Squadron, details of his DFM having been published on 14 September 1943, he had flown with Norwegian, Lt E. Sandberg. The following on the aircraft were KIA: Sgt E J Rowlands RAF, (he rests in Nederweert War Cemetery, F/S M B Rumbles RAF -, F/S L J Making RAF; F/S A A

Jepson RCAF,(these three buried at Eindhoven General Cemetery); W/O G A D Mould (commemorated on panel 214 Runnymede Memorial). W/O J A Porter, RAF, pow.
Hid at Kwakkelstraat in August 1944

9)F/S Roy Reading -76 Sqn Halifax III MZ575 MP-W Op to Hasselt T/o 2225 12-13 May 1944 from Holme-on-Spalding Moor was shot down by night fighter (Obt Tober III/NJG2) and crashed near Hulshout (Brabant), 3km N of Aarschot, Belgium, Killed that night: F/O J. Newcombe-RAF, Mentioned in Dispatches; F/O A Crouch, DFM, S/L N L Shove DFC, F/O C H Stewart DFC F/O C W Saunderson pow F/O H D Reeder (buried at Schoonselhof) Roy Reading was hidden at Kwakkelstraat in August 1944

10) S/Sgt Roy O. Martin USA

Hidden at Kwakkelstraat from August 17 to August 18 1944

Please read the section on Col. Neels in Kamiel Merten's book: "Balen tijdens de tweede wereldoorlog" pp 425-428.

It is likely that Peter Knox actually met Henry Griffis and Daniel Cargile in August 1944 as they would have been together from August 12 to August 14 and helped translate French for them - he refers to meeting two US airmen from the Flying Fortress who were being hidden at 80 Kwakkelstraat - Among the many Resistance contacts were Jules Theodore Laf li, Avenue de la Toison d'or 23 in Brussels. He was Mrs. Verstraeten's brother. He also hid many airmen and worked with the other members of the Resistance.

According to records, Zosine Verstraeten-Laf li not only helped escaped airmen, she assisted in the escape of Belgian nationals from German labour camps and was active in passing information on bombardments related to the allied command centres including disruption to communications, road and rail.

Zosine transferred falsified documents including id cards and work permits for members of the resistance and escaping airmen. She would pick up these falsified documents from the home of Mr. De Meyer in Victoriestraat 102 Brussels. She was able to hand over these documents to member of the Arendonck Resistance Group - these were witnessed by R. Donders. Arendonck had a notorious German Concentration Camp.

Zosine Verstraeten Laf li was officially honoured by allied governments for the work she had done with the Resistance. She received the following honours;

Belgian Government

"Medal of Armed Resistance"

"Agent Second Class in Information and Action Services", later upgraded to

"Agent First Class",

"Belgian Medal of Remembrance 1940-45" with "crossed sabers" April 26 1949

British Government

"King's Medal for Courage in the Cause of Freedom"

United States Government

"Citation for the medal of Freedom with Bronze Palm" April 11 1947

Zosine Lafili Worked with Members of Belgian Resistance including:

Mrs. Lafili worked with her brother – Jules Theodore Lafili and most probably worked with the following Members of the Resistance in Belgium. Mrs. Zosine Lafili acted as the local Chief of the Resistance Group M.N.B Mouvement Nationale Belge

R. Degroot – living in Lindeplein 2 at Moerbeke-Waas (village in East Flanders)

Leon Detaille - Otterstraat in Turnhout

R. Donders (he witnessed falsified documents)

Mr. De Meyer – Victoriestraat 102 Brussels (picked up falsified documents)

Albertus Gever - Alf. Pietersstraat 116 in Ostend (Albertus & his brother Ferdinand both from Mol)

Ferdinand Gever - lived in Mol by the train station

Mr. Leemans and Mrs. Jeanne Leemans-Schlesser – living in Geel

Mr. Martin – Ravelsche Steenweg in Ravels

Renaerts who searched for fallen airmen - a schoolteacher living in Retie

The Sterckx-Heyns family in Geel, including daughter Dimpna and son Jules – see separate article

Jacques van Bael - arrested by the Germans, locked up in the Camp of Flossenbug Germany where he died on April 25th 1945.

Josef Verstuyft - Steenweg op Beerse 3 in Merksplas

(above information obtained by Kamiel Mertens through different records dating back to 1950).

Both Tweedy and Rae had been helped by the Nevelsteen Family – at Geel-Punt (Antwerpseweg)

Mr. Frans Nevelsteen and his wife Mrs. Dimpna D'Joos (both were arrested along with their son Karel and sent to KZ in Germany. Father and son died in the KZ Dora (Mittelbau-Werke V1 and V2) (per Kamiel Mertens Research).

Tweedy and Rae were also looked after by Louis S'Jegers and Marcel and Madeleine Peeters-Driessen of Geel.

There is written testimony by Lt Theodore Kleinman in the archives in Belgium praising her courage and intellect and documents "if anybody in Belgium should receive a medal, it must be Zosine LAFILI". He would know as he spent seven weeks at the home in Kwakkelstraat.

I am sure there is plenty more to say about the courage and heroism of Zosine Lafili and those whose lives she saved at the peril of her own - this is the information we have available as of June 18, 2006. It also gives a glimpse of those others, including her brother Jules Theodore Lafili who did so much to save so many.

Jane Knox-Kiepurra – June 2006

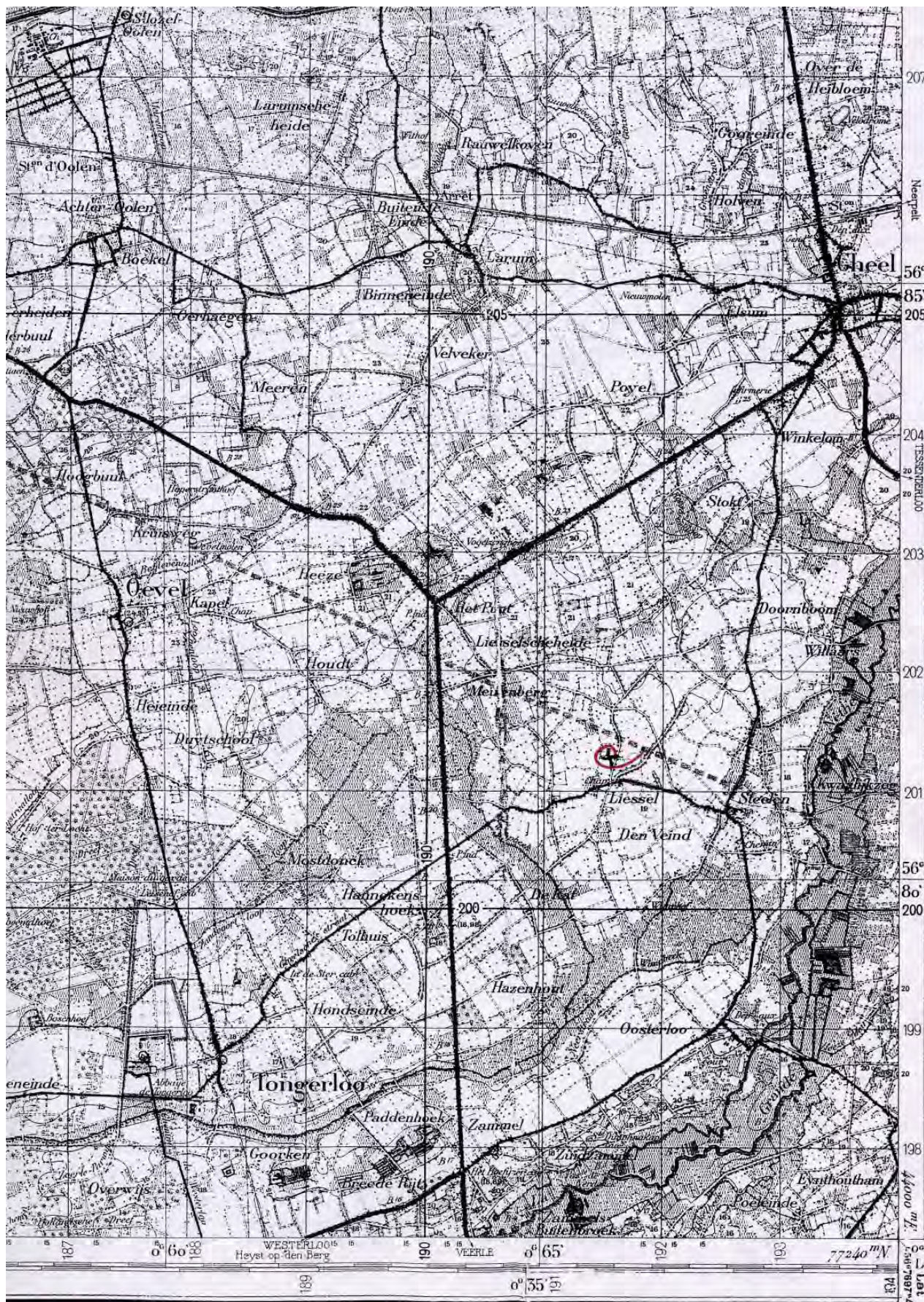
Research contributed by Kamiel Mertens 2005-2006

References also found in:

Jules Heyns' Book:

Gelenaars van alle tijden



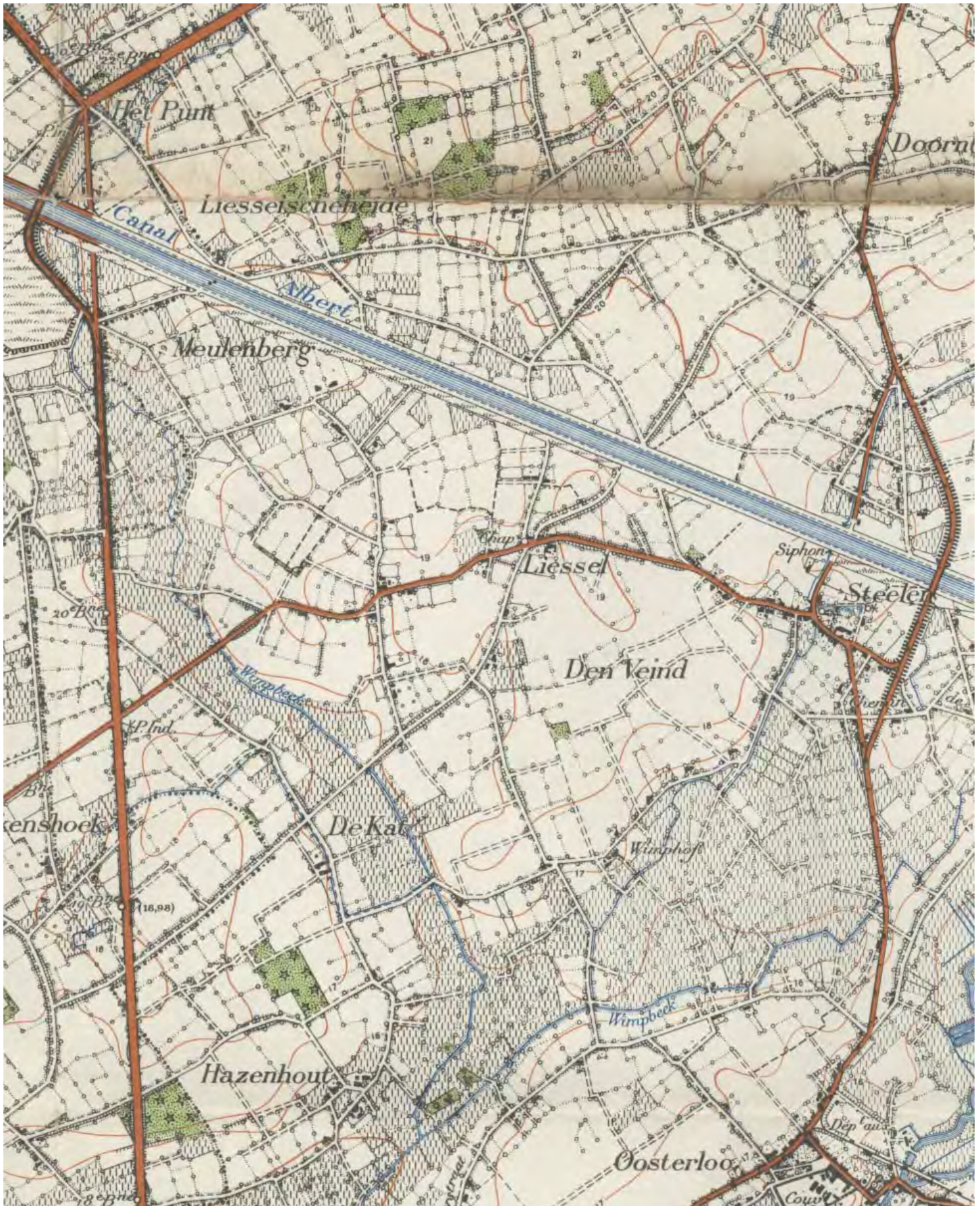


X = 4092 HOF AN SEEN-WESE (SOUTH ALBERT-CANAL)

1/40.000
DEUTSCHE MILITÄRANWANDERUNG 1941

Hergestellt im Auftrage Gen. St. d. H. Abt. f. Kr. Karten u. Verm. We
Planzeiger

Zum Ablesen ist die waagerechte Teilung so an eine waagerechte
Linie zu legen, daß die senkrechte Teilung den zu bezeichnender



A portion of a geographical map of Geel (situation 1939-1945).
It's the parish of Geel-Stelen with "Liessel".

A Special Thank You

Reina Van Der Goot, Sarah Rijpkema, Joris Toye and all the staff for their organization and assistance in accommodating us at the magnificent Radisson SAS Royal Hotel.

Johan and Lea van den Borne Proprietors of the Postelsche Hofstee in Postel (Mol) for all their assistance and kindness in accommodating us and catering the excellent luncheon on September 3rd 2006. Working with you was a delightful experience.

The Lord Mayor of Mol, Paul Rotthier for his leadership and graciousness in organizing today's event.

We thank the City of Mol for commissioning the monument to the crew of Lancaster 1 - ME846 and *Mr. Bert Leysen (city-engineer) for designing the memorial stone.*

Kamiel Mertens who has been the spirit and guide behind today's ceremony. Through his dedicated research and professional knowledge he has provided us with a wealth of information that we can now share with all of you.

Dr. Johan Claes for his support and assistance to Kamiel Mertens and all the staff of Studium Generale vzw, including Rene Geukens, Jan Siegers and Maria Wils

Also Jules Heyns for his work "Gelenaars van alle tijden"

Mrs. Gonnie Leysen from the City Archives in Geel

Thanks also to Col. Neels, the Vermierdt family, the Maes family, the Sterckx family and their relatives

Father E. van den Bergh (dec'd) for his courage and bravery in writing the account of the crash of Lancaster I ME846 and the fate of the crew in his book "Postele Op Ter Heyden" in 1944.

I want to especially thank my husband Marjan Kiepura for his enthusiasm and generosity to bring forth this event that recognizes the valour and bravery of the crew of ME846 and the Belgian people.

I want to thank Diane Brown of Foxtale Studio for devoting her precious time, artistic and photographic skills in ensuring the quality of this Souvenir Program.

Most all we want to thank all those in the RAF who risked their lives for us, and the Belgian people of this region who saved so many

Thank you all, Friends and Family for being a part of this historic event on September 3rd, 2006

Jane Knox-Kiepura
Littleton New Hampshire

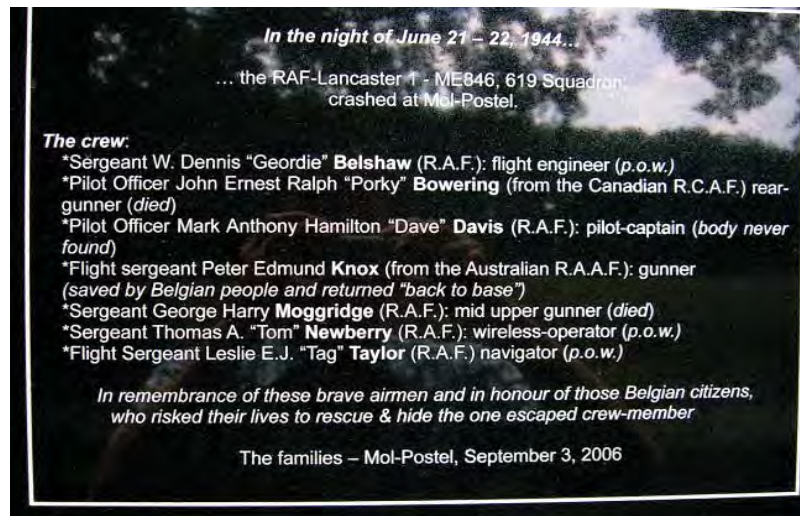
June 11 2005 Plaque Unveiling in front of Vulcan Bomber



Left to right:

Neil Webster, Alexander Knox, Philomena Knox, Christine Cardose, Richard Craven-Smith-Milnes (hidden behind) Father Norman Taylor standing behind his wife, Sarah in white jacket, Kate Taylor, Hilary Grant (nee Taylor), Alan Taylor, Jan Taylor, Simon Taylor, Chris Grant, Christine Thomas (nee Moggridge), standing behind and hidden, Colin Thomas, Richard Fane, Anne Fane (nee Knox), Jane Knox-Kiepura, Marjan Kiepura, Eileen Taylor, James Stevenson, Robert Stevenson, Monica Knox (Michael Knox in front) Paul Stevenson, Gill Stevenson, Jerome Knox (behind Gill) Paul Knox, Louisa Knox, Penny Scott (nee Davis), Peter Scott, Eleanor Moffatt, Stephen Moffatt, Toby Scott, Simon Scott, Chris Bowering, Gerald Moggridge, Claire Moggridge, Edmund Knox.

In picture but hidden - Jane Craven-Smith-Milnes, Chris Cardose, Chris Grant



Monument to be dedicated in Postel - September 3, 2006

In honor of the RAF and Belgian people

ME846 Peter Knox in Belgium 1944

Looking for "Captain Davis" the story of ME846
This is a synopsis of the Story of ME846

Lancaster 1, PG-C, Registration ME846 – 21st/22nd June 1944

On the night of 21st/22nd June 1944, one of the shortest nights of the year, 16 Lancasters of 619 Squadron at Dunholme Lodge, were to be included with aircraft from 44 Squadron and 49 Squadron in a task force of 133 Lancasters and 6 Mosquitos to attack the oil and fuel dumps at Wesseling, to the south of Cologne. This was considered a tough target, deep into enemy territory and new crews were not included.

Lancaster ME846, delivered to the squadron on 11th June, had only flown 8 hours and was to carry a big load of both fuel and bombs for this raid. For the first time in the seven missions completed by the chosen crew, the bomb load was to include a "Cookie" (4,000lb bomb) plus 16 x 500 lb bombs and the bombing height for this raid was fixed at 20,000 feet.

The crew to fly the aircraft on this mission was made up of:

Pilot:	Pilot Officer Mark Anthony Hamilton "Dave" Davis, RAFVR.
Flight Engineer:	Sergeant W. Dennis "Geordie" Belshaw, RAF.
Bomb Aimer:	Flight Sergeant Peter Edmund "Pete" Knox, RAAF.
Navigator:	Flight Sergeant Leslie E. J. "Tag" Taylor, RAF.
Wireless Operator:	Sergeant Thomas A. "Tom" Newbery, RAF
Mid-Upper Gunner:	Sergeant George Harry Moggridge, RAFVR.
Rear Gunner:	Pilot Officer John Ernest Ralf "Porky" Bowering, RCAF.

From the diaries of Peter Knox, Leslie Taylor and Dennis Belshaw; from RAF records as well as the official report submitted by the crew of the German fighter that shot down the Lancaster, we know some of the events that took place that night.

The route for this raid was to take the bomber stream in various dog-legs, in order to confuse the enemy, to the eventual target at Wesseling, south of Cologne, starting from an assembly point over the North Sea for all the aircraft involved, which was at 5230N/0300E.

At 2301 hours the fully fuelled Lancaster lumbered off the runway carrying its crew of seven and 12,000lbs of bombs, rising slowly over the Lincolnshire countryside with its heavy load. Like the other pilots of his squadron, Dave struggled to climb to meet with all the aircraft in the raid and as they moved out towards the North Sea, he watched as other squadrons joined the bomber stream from their respective airfields.

Leslie Taylor, as navigator, had set the course to the assembly point and then on reaching this, had given a new heading to Dave to the next marker at 5145N/0350E, just south of the island of Walcheren, where the whole bomber stream was to be at 14,000 feet.

As they flew over the North Sea towards Europe, they ran into a problem. Flight Engineer, Dennis Belshaw takes up the story. *"Initially the trip was quiet & uneventful, then just after the first hour had passed we started to have our first trouble. It was nothing serious just a spot of overheating in two of our engines so I, as flight engineer of the aircraft, advised the Skipper to level out, for at that time we were still climbing on course. The Skipper taking my advice, levelled out and so, for the next 15 minutes, we flew along that way. When I decided that the engines were cool enough to resume climbing, I passed on the information to the Skipper and we started once more to climb. It was through this method of climbing in slow and easy stages that we got to 14,000 feet when we crossed over the Dutch island of Walcheren, close to the Belgium border."* On reaching this next marker, Leslie Taylor gave a new heading to Dave, which would take them, together with the rest of the formation, clear of much of the known anti-aircraft batteries. All the aircraft were to climb to 18,000 feet.

A short while later Peter Knox, the bomb aimer, reported: *"Fighter planes were dropping flares which lit up the sky between the Lancasters and the ground, silhouetting us for their attacks. Before we came under fire from that quarter, I reported seeing flashes from anti-aircraft guns on the ground and in accordance with established routines we started to weave."*

On reaching the next turning point at 5140N/0505E, a few kilo metres north of Turnhout in Belgium, the bomber stream split, some carrying on 090 degrees whilst ME846 turned to the south with the remaining bombers onto a new heading on 170 degrees, heading to the next turning point at 5100N/0525E just north of Hasselt in Belgium. However the aircraft never made this position, for, as it was approximately 20kms south west of Eindhoven and probably still below the main formation due to the earlier engine problems, it was picked out by a Messerschmitt Bf 110 G9+BC night fighter of No. 1 Night Fighter Squadron, piloted by Hauptman Eckhart von Bonin, with navigator, Staff Sergeant Johrden and Gunner, First Private Zerbach. This aircraft has, in its armament, four upward firing guns that can be used to great effect when flying directly beneath an enemy aircraft. The tactic adopted was called "Schrage Music" where the Messerschmitt would slowly creep up underneath an unsuspecting bomber and shoot straight upwards into the wing tanks. The success rate was very high and the RAF had no idea for some months why so many aircraft were being lost. The reports subsequently made by the Messerschmitt crew, indicated that they took off on a night sortie at 0042 hours in "undirected tame boar" mode. "ungefuerter zahmer Sau" ("Undirected tame boar" was a tactic used by night fighters with Liechtenstein Radar, without direction from ground radar, searching in groups and co-ordinating themselves by radio. The name derives from "Raging Boar", a tactic used by day fighters who, when flying at night, attacked on eye sight alone without external or internal radar direction.). They soon located the bomber stream flying south-west of Eindhoven at 6,000 metres (19,700 feet) on a course of 170 degrees. At 0109 hours the radio operator identified and directed the pilot to a four engine bomber flying at 5400 metres (18,000 feet). The pilot of the Messerschmitt moved into the assault position beneath the Lancaster, he continues; *"...at 0112 hours I did shoot a good laying, long salvo from the fuselage to the right inner engine, the enemy plane instantly began to burn bright in the hit area..."* The Gunner reported; *"...the fire also covering the rear fuselage..."*

Peter Knox comments: *"... there was the sound of a muffled explosion and a jolt. The pilot was momentarily startled and said "!!!!". Our plane had been hit by ack-ack(he and the rest of the crew had no idea that they had in fact been targeted by an enemy aircraft) and one of the starboard engines was on fire."*

Dennis Belshaw: *"We were hit in the starboard outer engine which caught fire immediately and even though I feathered the engine and then pressed the fire extinguisher button, the fire still continued to spread rapidly towards the fuel tanks."*

Peter Knox: *"Immediately we reverted to the language drilled into us in the many hours of practice for just such an emergency. In a very few seconds he (the Skipper) clearly recognised that the fire was out of control. In a calm clipped voice he said "abandon aircraft-emergency, jump, jump." We now went into the automatic response stage. I was lying over the front exit through which the bomb-aimer, navigator, wireless-operator, flight-engineer and pilot had to make their escape. The two gunners had escape routes at the rear. As soon as the pilot gave the orders to abandon the plane, we each had to confirm over the inter-com that we were jumping. As I had to lift up the escape hatch I responded first, "air-bomber jumping". I heard the others starting to confirm that they were going too. There was no shouting, no calls for help. In a numbed state, I moved into the escape routine. I scrambled to my feet, grabbing and fixing the parachute onto the harness by clips in front of the chest and sneaking a look at the fire engulfing the wing. I was now disconnected from the inter-com. Since we were at close to 20,000 feet, we had to keep using oxygen until the very last seconds. For this we had individual supplies. I undid the clips of the escape hatch and lifted it for jettisoning. The force of the rush of air twisted it as it dropped vertically through the hatch. For a horrible second it was jamming the escape route. I kicked it clear, saw the gaping hole with a sense of enormous relief and rolled out head first."*

Dennis Belshaw recounts that *"On hearing this, (the order to abandon the aircraft) I went into a panic for a short while, but managed to calm down enough to be able to carry out my duties. I divested my helmet & oxygen mask, clipped on my parachute then handed the Skipper his parachute. By this time the navigator was pushing me from behind, hurrying me on. So seeing there was nothing else I could do and knowing that Pete the bomb aimer had already jumped, I moved down into the bomb aimer's compartment and, after checking my 'chute and harness, I jumped from the aircraft."* Years later, the widow of Dennis Belshaw said that Dennis had told her that he was reluctant to leave the aircraft. He apparently elected to assist Dave in the flying of the crippled plane, but Dave had had to order him to jump. This delay in leaving the aircraft is perhaps why the navigator was pressing him from behind

Leslie Taylor was equally shocked and reports on hearing the instruction to abandon the aircraft: *"My God, I'm a dead man I thought to myself. However, I seemed to move away from my navigation table as if it were all part of the usual routine. I clipped on my parachute pack, discarded my helmet and moved forward to the nose in readiness for the "bailing out". From the cabin I could see that our starboard outer engine had gone and that we were blazing furiously aft. I tapped the pilot on the shoulder and waved cheerio. Once in the nose, without losing a single second, I plunged through the escape hatch."* The wireless operator, Thomas Newbery followed Leslie out of the aircraft. Unfortunately we do not have his account.

Peter Knox continues: *"It takes no courage to leave a burning aircraft with a load of bombs and fuel aboard. The instinct for survival is strong and the sky stretching out below*

represented safety. All this time the pilot was holding the plane steady. As I tumbled clear of the plane, I fumbled for the ripcord. At first my hand found the cloth strap of the parachute bag. Quickly it moved to the ripcord. I pulled it and almost instantly the parachute opened and, with a violent jerk, my fall was broken. I found myself floating. This was an environment for which there had been no rehearsal. I was no longer responding like a robot to in-built commands. The disaster which had hit us struck me and, although I have never been a hard swearer, my first conscious thought was to swear.. Then I recollect thanking God I had escaped and rather desperately willing that my mother and father should somehow know I was alive. I could hear the droning of the Lancasters above as they pushed on towards the target."

Meanwhile, as the aircraft had rapidly descended out of the main stream of the formation, Dave had turned the aircraft to port and onto a reciprocal course and, although uninjured, had been holding the lurching plane as steadily as possible to allow all of the crew to escape. What happened next is not clear. It is known that the flight engineer, the navigator and the wireless-operator left the aircraft after the bomb aimer, but the fifth to leave by that exit, Dave, did not follow and it would appear the two gunners never made it from their exit either, despite a clear indication from the mid-upper gunner, George Moggridge, that he was jumping. However, both Peter and Leslie were sure that the rear-gunner, John Bowe ring, already lay dead in his turret as nothing was heard from him over the intercom before they jumped. It is therefore likely that whilst Dave stayed at the controls of the aircraft, George Moggridge, on clipping on his parachute in the rear of the plane, noticed that the rear-gunner had not left the aircraft and went to his aid, telling Dave of the problem at the same time. However, with the starboard wing and the rear of the fuselage now on fire, it is also possible that the escape exit for the gunners was blocked by these flames, as their exit was on the starboard side of the plane.

The crew of the Messerschmitt reported that after being hit, the Lancaster went into a left curve and into a steep dive, burning brightly. At the upper layer of cloud cover at about 1,000 metres (3,300 feet) there was a small explosion and the aircraft broke into two parts with the right wing falling away from the fuselage. The two parts crashed at 0114 hours with the impact fire seen as a sudden illumination through the thin cloud cover. They reported the wreck site to be about 20-30 km south-south west of Eindhoven.

This reported "sudden illumination" would have been when the aircraft's bomb load finally exploded, for, according to RAF records, the aircraft exploded in mid-air with the crash site in the Bladel Woods on the Dutch side of the border with Belgium, but nothing to identify it has ever been recovered by the RAF. Peter Knox, Leslie Taylor & Dennis Belshaw indicated that it exploded below them whilst they were still on their parachutes above the cloud cover, so, like the crew of the Messerschmitt, all they would have seen would have been the illumination of the explosion through the cloud.

Note: The explosion was confirmed by the Parish priest in Postel on the Belgian side of the border.

Peter Knox again, whilst still descending by parachute: *"Within a very short space of time I saw the explosion as our plane plummeted into the ground. I wondered if the others had got out and I shouted out the name of "George", our mid-upper gunner. I thought he might have jumped about the same time as me. My voice seemed to be lost in the vast dark space around me and I realised there was no possibility of making any form of human contact. I*

calculated that it took me some 15 minutes to reach the ground. At first I found it hard to stop myself from swinging as the wind blew the parachute around and at one point I was sick. Then I entered calmer air and the descent became quite smooth. Looking back I cannot recall worrying about the landing. I knew we were over land and that our flight path had kept us clear of major cities. I passed through some clouds and before I had time to realise it I had hit the ground on the fringe of a pine forest and my parachute was snagged on a small tree. Luck was on my side. I was unhurt. The weather was fine. It was dark and I was in an isolated area."

On leaving the aircraft, Dennis Belshaw comments, "I had no trouble whatsoever with my parachute, it opened smoothly and quickly and so I started my slow descent to the earth or the black unknown below me. On the way down I had one or two scares. First of all there was a rocket coming for me or at least so I thought, then there was Flak bursting on all sides of me, but to crown it all, fighter flares were dropping on my left and through the illumination I could see a fighter coming towards me. On seeing this I slumped in my harness as though I was dead and it seemed to work for on seeing this he banked sharply to my port and left me alive to continue down to earth. My actions may have been foolish, but it is best in my opinion to take no chances these days. I was slowly descending and at that moment I hit the cloud, which in my opinion was about at 10,000 feet. It was then that I realised I was on my own and in a rotten predicament coming down in enemy territory. For the next few minutes I forgot all about that because my descent was ending and I was about 50 feet from the ground before I realised it was so near. The next thing that happened was as I was getting ready for the impact, I felt something whipping passed me and it wasn't until I became stationary that I realised that my parachute had caught itself in the branches of a large poplar tree and that I had been dragged through the branches. I also realised at that moment that I was suspended by my parachute about 10 or 15 feet from the ground and that though having all my weight on my harness, I could not release myself from the chute. On seeing this I started to swing about until my right foot rested on a branch and then taking my weight on my right leg, I managed to release myself from the harness and parachute. Immediately this happened I fell to the ground and after recovering from the shock of the impact, discovered I had come through all my adventures without a scratch."

Leslie Taylor had a similar experience, "...the next thing I knew I was floating down to earth. It was an exhilarating feeling after the stuffy atmosphere of the aircraft, but the constant anti-aircraft shells bursting all around me were rather worrying, also the fact that I was over enemy occupied territory and wondering what was going to happen to me. Whilst I was still coming down, I heard a terrible explosion beneath me and when I saw the flames shooting up, I realised that it was the end of "C" Charlie, our faithful Lancaster Bomber. Through the darkness I was just able to make out some vague shadows; it looked like a wood and before I realised just what it was, I hit the ground with a bump, certainly not in the approved fashion. I picked myself up and after releasing my harness, said to myself, "You're safe on terra firma, you lucky blighter". When I thought of what might have happened to my crew, a lump came to my throat."

This explosion of the aircraft is confirmed by the Parish priest from Postel who says "1944, night of 20 June; (it is thought that he has the incorrect date as no aircraft were reported lost over Postel on 20th) heavy firing from Flak to squadrons of RAF-planes flying direction Germany. A loaded bomber exploded in the air in the vicinity of the border-markers on the Bladelse weg. The explosion was so violent that all the windows of the houses were broken.

Two "pilotes" (airmen) were found dead, very heavy wounded ("vermorzeld"= "crushed"?). Others were saved by parachute. One of them with a "sprained ankle" gave himself up to the Germans, after landing at "Steenovens" (a location about 4km south of the presumed crash site. This man is thought to be the fourth crew member to bail-out, the wireless operator, Thomas Newbery.) On June 23, 14 German soldiers arrived in the abbey. Their task: to clean up all the plane-wreckage in the entire region..."

From Leslie Taylor we know that the aircraft was shot down at approximately 0120 hours on 22nd June, near Postel and close to the Belgium/Dutch border. He estimated his position when he landed as 15kms southeast of Postel but to the northeast of a canal or river which blocked his movements to the west. Peter Knox, bailing out first, had landed further to the south-east, but on the southern side of this obstruction and therefore had an easier route towards the west. German reports confirm the crash site to be 4kms north of Postel.

Leslie Taylor, Thomas Newbery, and Dennis Belshaw were eventually captured and spent the next 11 months until the end of hostilities, as prisoners of war. Peter Knox made contact with the Belgium resistance movement and eventually arrived back in England, where he immediately insisted on meeting with all the British families of the crew to inform them of the circumstances of that night. On his way home to Australia, he stopped in Canada to meet with the parents of John Bowering too. These families have always been most grateful to Peter for this selfless act in taking the time to explain to them what had occurred that night.

The RAF losses for this raid were very high, with 37 aircraft failing to return, a loss rate of nearly 28%. For 619 Squadron the loss rate was even higher as 6 aircraft failed to return out of 15 (one aircraft had to abandon the raid due to technical problems), a loss rate of 40%. The comment in the squadron Operation Log says "Six aircraft did not return, a very black blot in the history of the squadron. Never before have so many failed to return from one operation".

The bodies of the two gunners from ME846, Sergeant George Moggridge and Pilot Officer John Bowering were recovered and were moved to Deurne and then re-buried side by side after the war at the Schoonselhof cemetery in Antwerp in Plot IVa, Row F, Graves 16 & 17.

But of Dave there was nothing. One year later his mother still not knowing if her son was alive or dead, wrote to the mother of Dennis Belshaw, *"My son was the pilot of the aircraft in which your son was the engineer. The Air Ministry say they can find no trace of my son and if you have any news of your son or any information as to how the aircraft was abandoned, will you please let me know? I know nothing and the suspense is beyond words! Please let me know all you can."* Despite the information supplied by the surviving members of the crew, she died 8 years later, resigned to the fact that Dave had died that night, but still not knowing where her beloved son's body lay at rest.

The families of the crew will not forget the actions of Dave and all the crew that night in those vital two minutes between being hit and the aircraft eventually exploding. Of the four who escaped and subsequently married, three produced offspring who in turn have married. There are now over 35 people who owe their lives to the courage of Dave remaining at the controls of the aircraft and many live in the hope that his final resting place will eventually be found.

The closure of this would be the recovery of Dave's remains for a formal burial. However, this seems highly unlikely, as the records held by the RAF confirm the total disintegration of the

aircraft, a not uncommon occurrence for a plane fully laden with fuel and bombs which is also crippled by fire. For me the final chapter of this story will to be the recovery of Dave, as he was my mother's youngest brother, aged just 20 years.

Paul M Stevenson
5th June 2005

Updated information.

On 11th June 2005 a plaque was dedicated to the crew at Newark Air Museum as it was on this site when it was RAF Winthorpe 1661 Heavy Conversion Unit, at which the crew converted to four engined Stirlings in March 1944 (see attached photo on page 9) before being posted to their squadron at Dunholme Lodge. Many of the relatives of the crew attended this event.

On 3rd September 2006 my wife and I and 55 relations and friends of the crew of Lancaster ME846 and over 200 local people were present at a ceremony in Belgium to commemorate the crew and also members of the Belgian Resistance who helped so many stranded allied airmen return to the UK at a considerable risk, not only to themselves, but also to their families. A monument to both the crew and the Resistance personnel has been erected by the mayor and people of nearby Mol. This is situated in the Bladel Woods close the Dutch border and as near to the probable crash site as possible, although no information as to the exact location has yet emerged. (See attached photo on page 10)

On 20th October 2010, Jane Kiepura has received an email from a Belgian, Koen Peeters, telling her that in the past 10 days he had discovered bits of aluminium and "broken bullets" in an area north of Postel Abbey on the Belgian side of the border with Holland.

On 21st October 2010 Koen Peeters identified a large crater in the Bladel Woods with more debris and he wonders if this might be the crash site of ME846. He has spoken to Kamiel Mertens who is one of our Belgian contacts investigating all the leads to where ME846 crashed. On 22nd October Koen Peeters found what he believed to be a metal buckle from a parachute, which is significant because there were possibly three parachutes in the aircraft when it crashed. On 23rd October Koen Peeters decided to stop digging any further and to leave this to the proper authorities and out of respect for the possible remains of the pilot that may lie at this location.

On 26th October 2010 Wim Govaerts visited the site and confirmed that a British aircraft had crashed at that location and that it was most likely to be ME846. In their opinion, the crater was consistent with the explosion of a 4,000lb bomb. So perhaps the aircraft had not exploded in the air as previously thought, but on the ground.

On 5th April 2011 Howard Heeley and I visited Postel Abbey in Belgium to meet with Father Ivor Billiaert, Kamiel Mertens, Wim Govaerts, Koen Peeters and Cynrik De Decker, to discuss if a search of the surrounding area was feasible. We visited the site, which is a peaceful location within the Bladel Woods about 300 metres from the Dutch border. The crater is 14 metres across and 4 metres deep. This has been deepened by the forestry authorities to hold water for fire fighting purposes. Pieces of aluminium are evident all around and some ferrous metal parts are buried more deeply, which are going to be investigated, as these could

possibly be unexploded munitions. British ammunition of .303 calibre used in Lancaster guns turrets was also found. It was agreed that members of BAHAAT would conduct a survey of the area this summer to investigate if there is any evidence to justify a major excavation in the area of the crater.

On returning from Belgium, I again wrote to the RAF to enquire as to any further information related to the crash of ME84 as the records held at The National Archives of the survey made by the RAF after the war to identify sites where airmen were still “missing”, is itself missing from the archives. I received a reply dated 19th May 2011, which indicated that the records still held by the RAF confirm that the aircraft did indeed explode in mid-air. This would explain why only small parts of aluminium have been found that are scattered over a wide area, but does not explain the large crater. (This letter is reproduced in full on pages 11 & 12)

On 2nd October 2011 the BAHAAT and Belgian Plané Hunters completed a survey of the crash site and in the crater. Various significant parts were unearthed, some with serial numbers, which could be used to identify the aircraft. These included: cockpit light; armour plate from pilot's seat; parachute harness buckle; tail fin balance weight; engine parts; metal surround from rear gun turret; various aluminium parts and cabling. Further analysis of some of these parts will be undertaken off site. However, no remains of the pilot were found during this survey.

Towards the very end of 2011, an exhibition was mounted in Belgium to show the general public many of the items found at the crash site during the survey and over 1000 people attended this exhibition. The site has still not been confirmed as the crash site of ME846.

Paul M Stevenson
6th February 2012

Acknowledgements:

Jane Kiepura – Daughter of Peter Knox, Bomb Aimer
Gerald Moggridge – Brother to George Moggridge, Upper Gunner
Chris Bowering – Nephew to John Bowering, Rear Gunner
Father Norman Taylor – Son of Leslie Taylor, Navigator
Lettie Belshaw – Wife of Dennis Belshaw, Flight Engineer
Kamiel Mertens – Flemish Researcher and author/publisher
Johan Claes – Flemish University Professor and Author
Howard Heeley – Trustee, Newark Air Museum, Nottinghamshire
Wim Govaerts – Belgian Aviation History Association Archaeological Team (BAHAAT)
Neil Webster – Aviation expert
Paul Petersen – Netherlands Air Force Recovery Unit
Dave Greenley – Translators from Dutch to English and visa versa
Koen Peeters – Belgian Author
Cynrik de Decker – Chairman, Belgian Aviation History Association Archaeological Team (BAHAAT)
Father Ivor Billiaert – Archivist at Postel Abbey



**Photograph of the crew taken at RAF Winthorpe, 1661 Conversion Unit, in early March 1944 in front of their Short Stirling after ground training at Scampton. (Note the snow in the fields on the left of the picture)
(Left to Right)**

1. Flight Sergeant, Peter Edmund "Pete" Knox – A418433 RAAF – Bomb Aimer
2. Sergeant, Thomas. A. "Tom" Newbery – 1602063 RAF – Wireless Operator
3. Sergeant, W. Dennis "Geordie" Belshaw – 1808996 RAF – Flight Engineer
4. Pilot Officer, Mark Anthony Hamilton "Dave" Davis – 174023 RAFVR – Pilot
5. Flight Sergeant, Leslie E. J. "Tag" Taylor – 1585057 RAF – Navigator
6. Sergeant, George Harry Moggridge – 1896779 RAFVR - Mid-Upper Gunner
7. Pilot Officer, John Ernest Ralph "Porky" Bowering – J/88199 RCAF – Rear Gunner

On the night of 21/22 June 1944, their aircraft (Lancaster 1 – ME846, Reg. PG-C) suffered severe night fighter damage and the starboard outer engine caught fire. Whilst the pilot held the aircraft steady, he instructed his crew to jump. Four of the crew are known to have bailed out and survived. According to RAF records and ground reports, the aircraft exploded in mid-air, close to the ground. An intensive search located the bodies of the rear and upper gunners, but failed to find the remains of the pilot or indeed much of the aircraft.

1. Flight Sergeant, P. E. Knox – Evaded capture and escaped back to England.
2. Sergeant, T. A. Newbery – POW.
3. Sergeant, W. D. Belshaw – POW
4. Pilot Officer, M. A. H. Davis – Killed in action – No known grave.
5. Flight Sergeant, L. E. Taylor – POW
6. Sergeant, G. H. Moggridge – Killed in action – Buried: Schoonselhof Cemetery, Antwerp, Belgium in Plot IVa, Row F, Grave 16.
7. Pilot Officer, J. E. R. Bowering – Killed in action – Buried: Schoonselhof Cemetery, Antwerp, Belgium, in Plot IVa, Row F, Grave 17.



Memorial to the crew of Lancaster ME846 and to the members of the Belgian Resistance, erected by the people of Mol, Belgium and unveiled on 3rd September 2006

This document details events to the best of our knowledge.

We have tried to be as accurate as possible.

We welcome any comments or additional information.



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