

“Looking for Captain Davis”



Belgium

September 1 - 3, 2006

Brussels-Mol-Postel Weekend, September 2006

You wouldn't have missed the crewmen from the plane
That came down near the woodland glade where we stood,
As it would have stretched the skills even of Jane
And Kamiel to raise those taken, brave and good.
What you'd have missed, though, was a festival of thanks
To Alfons who found our father in a field
And, with Neels and Zosine, defied Nazi tanks,
By shepherding him to friends sworn not to yield,
Like Dimpna. Nor would you have heard the Mayor dwell
On airmen they'd have loved to help, but it was
Too late, both that night, and other nights as well.
But you don't need to be told all this because,
As a member of our war-spawned family,
You were there at Jane and Marjan's jamboree.

Edmund Knox - 2006

"Looking for Captain Davis"

SEARCHING FOR A HERO AND HIS PLANE – ME846 LANCASTER 1 619 SQUADRON THE CELEBRATIONS HELD IN BRUSSELS AND MOL/POSTEL

The three day celebration held in Brussels and Mol/Postel on the Dutch border was all part of our journey to find answers on the whereabouts of Pilot Officer Mark Hamilton Anthony "Dave" Davis and the plane that he kept "steady" so that four members of the crew could survive. One of the crew members was Flight Sergeant Peter Edmund Knox RAAF, my father and father to my seven brothers and sisters.

The large party held on Friday and Saturday night and the trip down to Postel for the "Unveiling of the Monument" in dedication to the seven crew members was a bitter sweet time for us all. We all came away with our own very special and unique thoughts. We were particularly happy to have with us John Whiteley from the 619 Squadron along with Joe Dutton, Treasurer of the 619 Squadron. The spirit and generosity of everyone present was overwhelming.



We were also very grateful and proud to have the support of James Baxter, Counsellor of the Australian Embassy who joined us on our first night and Ms Carol Nicoll, Minister-Counsellor Education, Science and Research of the Australian Embassy who came down to Postel in the rain and join us at the Unveiling Ceremony itself.

Among the many people who had gathered, there were members of the Belgian Resistance, including those who had helped my father evade capture after being shot down on June 21/22 1944. Namely Colonel Neels, the Sterckx family and the Vermierdt family. The story of these special people is well documented.

However, there is one person who was the catalyst in ensuring the success of the whole event and that is Kamiel Mertens. He has spent hours of research seeking clues on the whereabouts of Captain Davis and all those involved with the crew of ME846. Without him the ceremony surrounding September 3, 2006 would not have been possible. The following pages contain some of the memories of the weekend. It was certainly three days of my life I will never forget.

Another catalyst and spirit behind many of the activities, newsletters and organization is Howard Heeley. Thank you Howard for giving so generously of your time and organizational skills. Your dedication has motivated us all in the ME846 family of the 619 Squadron to be guided by the call "Per ardua ad astra". Not only is Howard the guiding light to keep us on the right path, we are lucky enough to have the full participation of his family, his wife Helen and two sons Nick and Chris. All have shown their unending enthusiasm and support, in the case of Nick and Chris providing us with their vocal talents as well.

Paul Stevenson, together with his wife Gill are always a great source of strength and inspiration and never fail to keep up the great spirit of the ME846 family. His eloquence combined with that subtle sense of humour gives us all the impetus to continue the search for his beloved uncle. No event would be complete without Paul and Gill. Father Norman Taylor brings to our family true spiritual guidance

from the perspective of “peace and reconciliation” while never forgetting the role these brave young men played in our freedom. Father Norman and his siblings all help to make our family whole. The Belshaw family also reminds us of the generosity and comradeship that existed among the crew – when they always invited the two Commonwealth members of the crew, Knox and Bowering to their home in Bear Park, Durham. They are still filled with that same generosity.

Most of all I want to thank my husband, Marjan Kiepura, for not only generously hosting the dinners and luncheon, but for his energy and spirit to make this all happen.

We look forward to our next event that we will be hosting – September 26-28th 2008 in Lincolnshire where we look forward to re-uniting with old friends and hope to meet many new ones as well.

Jane Knox-Kiepura



“ME846 FAMILY” REUNION 2006 *MEMORIAL DEDICATION CEREMONY – MOL-POSTEL, BELGIUM*

Fourteen months after 46 friends and relatives first gathered at Newark Air Museum to witness a Plaque unveiling in memory of the crew of crashed 619 Squadron, Lancaster 1 ME846, the “ME846 Family” gathered together again in Belgium over the weekend of September 1 to 3, 2006. This growing family has been drawn together by the common bond of the events surrounding the loss of ME846 and the shared desire to travel to Belgium to celebrate the unveiling of a Memorial Plaque in Mol Postel, Belgium.

Everyone initially gathered together in Brussels where on the Friday and Saturday evenings they attended receptions at the Radisson SAS Royal Hotel, hosted by Marjan Kiepura and his wife Jane Knox-Kiepura, daughter of the ME846’s Australian bomb aimer, Flight Sergeant Peter Edmund Knox.



Marjan Kiepura launched the proceedings by performing Chopin’s “Raindrop Prelude” with great artistry and depth followed by an intermingling of speeches and further musical interludes. James Baxter, Counsellor of the Australian Embassy attended the opening ceremony. Once again friendships were renewed, information was shared and new bonds were forged before everyone prepared themselves to travel to Mol for the unveiling ceremony at 11am on Sunday September 3, 2006.

The memorial incorporates a freestone laser etched plaque mounted in a small blue brick wall. It has been built next to a major cycle track in the woods at Mol Postel close to the believed ME846 crash site. The memorial has been constructed thanks to the generosity of the town’s Lord Mayor, Burgemeester Paul Rotthier, who commissioned its production by Mr Bert Leysen, the Mol city engineer to specifications provided by Belgian Historian, Kamiel Mertens. The plaque features a picture of the crew taken during training with 1661 HCU at RAF Winthorpe and an inscription in memory of the crew and the Belgian people who assisted in the safe escape of Flight Sergeant Peter Edmund Knox.

Throughout the short dedication ceremony a guard of honour was provided by members of several Belgian Armed Forces Veterans Associations and the Mol Fire Brigade Band. Ms Carol Nicoll, Minister-Counsellor Education, Science and Research represented Australia. The ceremony was overseen by

Kamiel Mertens who introduced people associated with the instigation of the memorial, who each in turn gave a short speech. This included: Jane Knox-Kiepora, daughter of Flight Sergeant Peter Edmund Knox; John Whiteley, the Secretary of the 619 Squadron Association; and Burgemeester Paul Rotthier. After these speeches the memorial plaque was formally unveiled by Jane Knox-Kiepora and Paul Rotthier.



The Reverend Norman Taylor [Vicar of Durrington] and the son of Flight Sergeant Leslie Taylor, the Navigator on ME846, led the gathered assembly of more than 120 people in a short service of dedication and blessing. Reverend Taylor reflected on the sacrifices that are still being made by members of the armed services and asked everyone to give a special thought for the 14 crew members of the Nimrod from 120 Squadron, which had crashed in Afghanistan the day before. This was followed by everyone joining together to recite the International Prayer for Peace.



A wreath in memory of the crew of ME846 was laid by Paul Stevenson, the nephew of the ME846 pilot, Pilot Officer Mark Anthony Hamilton 'Dave' Davis, whose remains are still missing along with the crashed aircraft. This poignant moment was followed by the Fire Brigade Band playing the Last Post.

Despite the grey skies and intermittent rain that fell during the ceremony, this was not a sad occasion

but one of reflection and a shared bond forged by an event that originally took place in the skies over northern Belgium on June 21/22, 1944. There was a particularly poignant moment during the ceremony when the British, Belgian and American flags briefly became entwined, as if to signify the camaraderie of something that happened more than 62 years before.

After the ceremony Marjan Kiepora and Jane Knox-Kiepora hosted a lunch for everyone at the De Postelche Hofstee restaurant, close to the memorial site. During the lunch everyone was able to reflect on the weekend's commemorations and perhaps the most common two words to be heard were, ***"what if?"***

Many people present owed their existence to the brave efforts of Pilot Officer Davis in keeping the aircraft level and allowing some of his crew to escape from ME846 – ***"what if he had been unable to do that?"***



Some relatives of the crew reflected on the bravery of the local Belgian people and members of the Belgian Resistance, which helped members of ME846's crew, evade capture. In the case of Flight Sergeant Knox he was able to escape to England, whilst Sergeant Belshaw and Flight Sergeant Taylor were initially helped to evade capture before becoming prisoners of war - ***"what if these Belgians had not been such brave people would the survivors have been captured earlier?"***

It came to light that as the aircraft was crashing, mid-upper Gunner Sergeant Moggridge tried to help his fellow crew member, rear gunner Pilot Officer Bowering try to escape, *“what if he had not acted so bravely, might he have survived?”*

Another factor that shone through during the whole weekend of events in Belgium was how privileged the ‘ME846 Family’ felt to share the company of a number of people who were central characters in the still unfolding story of Lancaster 1 ME846, these included:

Alfons Vermierdt – who as 15 year old boy first found Flight Sergeant Knox.

Dimpna Sterckx – daughter of the family that hid Flight Sergeant Knox.

Louis Lafili and his wife represented Zosine Lafili (deceased) – a brave Belgian lady who assisted Flight Sergeant Knox and many other US, Canadian, Australian and British airmen to escape.

Col Victor Neels – a leader of the Belgian Resistance in the Mol-Postel area.

Flight Sergeant Reg Brookes – a crew member from a crashed 100 Squadron Lancaster, LL887 who was hidden with Flight Sergeant Knox in 1944 by the Sterckx family.

John Whiteley [Secretary] and Joe Dutton [Treasurer] of the 619 Squadron Association, who presented a 619 Squadron crest to the town of Mol.

The extensive research carried out by Jane Knox-Kiepora, Paul Stevenson, Neil Webster, Kamiel Mertens and Dr Johan Claes has been likened to a great jigsaw puzzle. Even now further pieces are coming to light, which in turn are opening up further avenues of investigation.

In the weeks leading up to the ceremony a news item in the Northern Echo newspaper in the northeast of England enabled the ‘ME846 Family’ to establish contact with the widow of Sergeant Belshaw. She was able to travel to Belgium with her daughter and granddaughter, where they were welcomed into the ‘ME848 Family’. They were able to provide details from Sergeant Belshaw’s diary, which may help establish contact with the Wireless Operator on ME846, Sergeant Thomas Newbery or members of his family. This came in the form of an address for Thomas Newbery - 16 Freshwater Road, Chadwell Heath in Dagenham.

Kamiel Mertens and Dr Johan Claes have also now obtained copies of the German [Abschussmeldung] incident report for the crash. This indicates that ME846 was actually shot down rather than being hit by flak. The report indicates that the aircraft was hit following an attack by a Messerschmitt BF 110 G-4 equipped night-fighter at 01.14 hours on June 22, 1944.

There is little doubt that the recent gathering in Belgium has been a life changing experience for people from many different generations. Likewise it is a live and ongoing project, which will hopefully establish contact with the family of Thomas Newbery, locate the precise location of the 619 Squadron Lancaster 1, ME846 crash site and perhaps one day recover the remains of Pilot Officer Mark Anthony Hamilton ‘Dave’ Davis.

“To be continued...”



After the speeches the memorial plaque was formally unveiled by Jane Knox-Kiepora and Paul Rothier.



For the many members of the Knox family present it was a special time to meet Alfons Vermierdt and Dimpna Sterckx - two people who had both risked a great deal as young teenagers to help Peter Knox evade capture.



Monica Knox & Lettie Belshaw

It was also a unique historical moment that the widows of Dennis Belshaw and Peter Knox should meet under these historic circumstances.

The Reverend Norman Taylor (Vicar of Durrington) and the son of the Navigator on ME846 led the gathered assembly of more than 120 people in a short service of dedication and blessing.



Reverend Taylor reflected on the sacrifices that are still being made by members of the armed services and asked everyone to give a special thought for the 14 crew members of the Nimrod from 120 Squadron, which had crashed in Afghanistan the day before. This was followed by everyone joining together to recite the International Prayer for Peace.



Kamiel Martens pictured above



John Whiteley from the 619 Squadron Association.



Paul Stevenson placing a wreath in memory of the Pilot Mark Anthony Hamilton 'Dave' Davis.



Reg and wife Hilda Brookes pictured with Dimpna Sterckx [centre] - she had hidden him in her house in 1944.

II./Nachtjagdgeschwader 1

Gefechtsstand, den 23. 6. 1944.

(Name, Dienstgrad, Truppenteil)

(Ort)

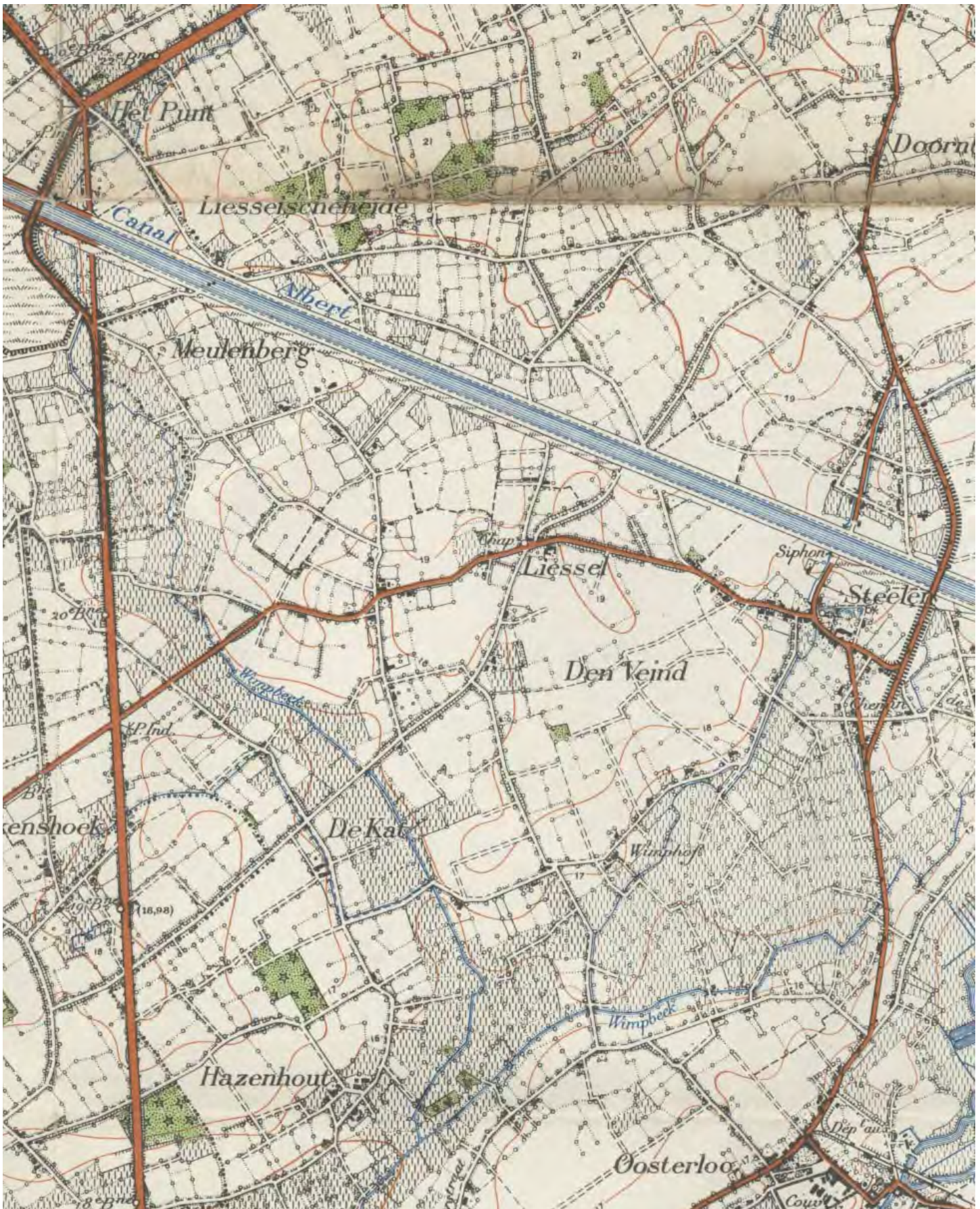
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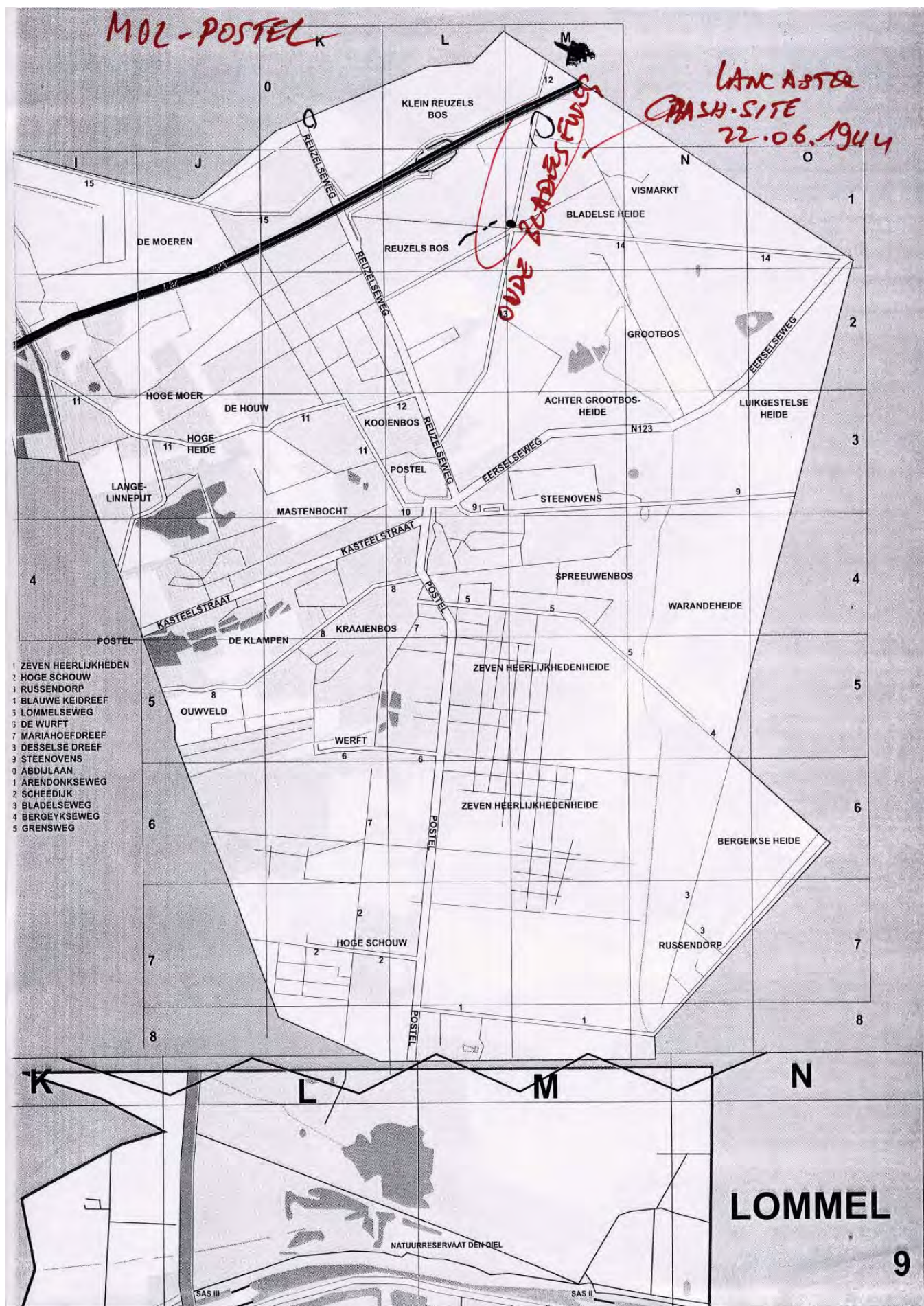
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336 Abschussmeldung

1. Zeit (Tag, Stunde, Minute) und Gegend: 22.6.1944 - 01.14 Uhr
IL - LM etwa 20 km südl. Eindhoven.
Höhe: 5400 m
1a) Durch wen ist der Abschuss erfolgt: Hptm. von Bonin - Obfw. Johrden -
Obgefr. Zerbach
2. Flugzeugtyp des abgeschossenen Flugzeuges: viermotorig mit doppeltem Leitwerk
3. Staatsangehörigkeit des Gegners: England
Merknummern: bzw. Kennzeichen:
4. Art der Vernichtung:
 - a) weisse Benzinfahne, dunkle Rauchfahne, helle Flammen
 - b) abmontiert (Einzelteile, auseinandergeplatzt)
 - c) zur Landung gezwungen (diesseits oder jenseits der Front
glatt bzw. mit Bruch)
 - d) nach Notlandung jenseits der Front am Boden in Brand geschossen
5. Art des Aufschlages:
 - a) diesseits oder jenseits der Front
 - b) senkrecht, flachen Winkel, Aufschlagbrand, Staubwolke
 - c) nicht beobachtet, warum nicht?
6. Schicksal der Insassen (tot, mit Fallschirm abgesprungen, nicht beobachtet)
7. Gefechtsbericht (siehe Anlage):
8. Zeugen:
 - a) Luft Obfw. Johrden - Obgefr. Zerbach
 - b) Erde
9. Anzahl der Angriffe, die auf das feindliche Flugzeug gemacht wurden: 1



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



PAUL STEVENSON

Ladies and Gentlemen;

I would just like to say a few words in reply to Marjan's comments concerning Captain Davis. I think I met him. I was only about three and on my mother's knee when he arrived at our house one day with his mother when he was on leave in early June 1944 and that is the last time we saw him.



Paul Stevenson

We now know, this evening, and my thanks go to Kamiel for this information, that the aircraft was not shot down by Flak as the crew thought, but by a Messerschmitt BF 110 night fighter which has vertically firing guns and the aircraft flew underneath the Lancaster. In those days there was a certain amount of chivalry and they went for the wing tanks of the Lancaster, not the crew, to give the crew a chance to get out. Unfortunately we do not know exactly what happened, but I have been told by Dennis Belshaw's widow, Lettie, who is here this evening with her daughter, Anne Walker, and granddaughter, Elizabeth Walker, that Dennis confirmed there were two heroes on the plane that night. My uncle did stay at the controls although uninjured allowing four of the crew to get out, but the upper gunner, George Moggridge, on coming down from his position when told to jump, fixed his parachute on and saw that Porky Bowering in the rear turret was either injured or trapped and he went to his aid. Unfortunately the aircraft blew up before anything could be done. The bodies of the two gunners were found close together but as we know the body of Dave was not found.

Tomorrow is going to be an eventful day and one in which we will all participate. Last year in Newark we dedicated a plaque to the crew and I never thought I would be here with a lot of the people who were there then and a lot more people today: 619 Squadron thanks you for coming. It is marvellous that there is such enthusiasm for this and I am very, very grateful to you all.



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

Ladies and gentlemen, Dear friends,

First of all I would like to give a warm welcome to our guests from Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. We are obviously very pleased to have you here. The world is growing smaller every day. Modern means of communication allow us to keep in touch with one another no matter where and when. The search that Kamiel Mertens completed last year in a relatively short period of time would have been extremely difficult sixty years ago.

Over the last century our country has been war-stricken twice. Our parents and grandparents know what occupation and repression is. Therefore they understand the meaning of the word “freedom” better than anyone else. They have personally experienced which price was paid for this freedom. With the unveiling of this memorial we commemorate the crew of the Lancaster -1, ME 846, which crashed here during the night of June 21st - 22nd 1944. You will find a detailed description of the events in the interesting brochure that Jane Knox-Kiepora has compiled and that will be made available to you. In the overall history of World War II the event may be no more than a detail. For the crew at that time and their families today it is a moving moment.

But this commemoration means a lot to us as well. Each year we commemorate the victims of both world wars. It is a sad fact that the number of direct witnesses decreases every year. The local authorities have taken the pledge to continue their testimony not only to remind younger generations of the fact that freedom sometimes takes a high toll and must not be taken for granted but also to point out to them the consequences of extremism and intolerance. The unveiling of this memorial brings the past back to life a little and supports the message that we want to spread.

Today, more than sixty years later in history, I would like to give the crew - Peter Knox, Thomas Newbery, Dennis Belshaw, Mark Davis, Leslie Taylor, George Moggridge and John Bowering - a posthumous welcome to our municipality. They will be given a second home here.

We are very much obliged to them for their courage and the high price they have paid for our freedom. At the same time I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to all those who laboured for the same ideal, in particular to our patriotic associations.

I thank all those who assisted in making this celebration successful. To the families of the crew members I promise that we will continue to cherish this memorial as a permanent reminder of the crew in particular and the idea of freedom in general.

Thank you
Paul Rotthier
Lord Mayor of Mol

Gemeente Mol • Molenhoekstraat 2 • 2400 Mol www.gemeentemol.be

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 Kiepora inspecting possible crash site.

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

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 fleece 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

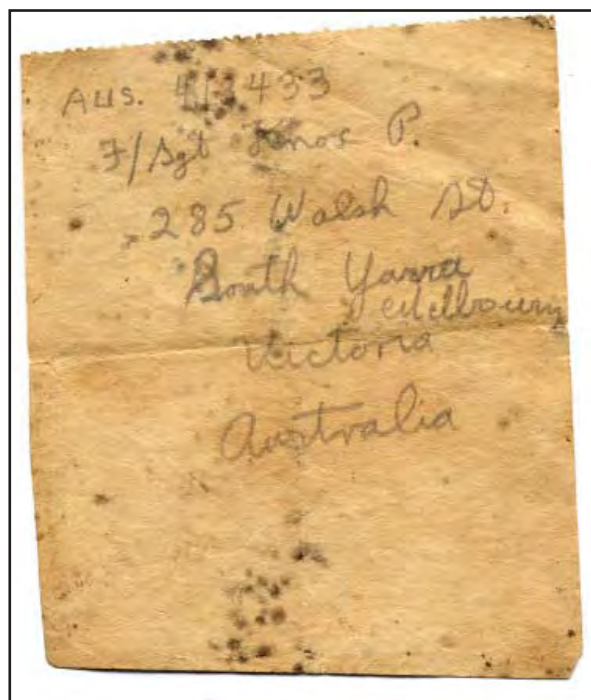
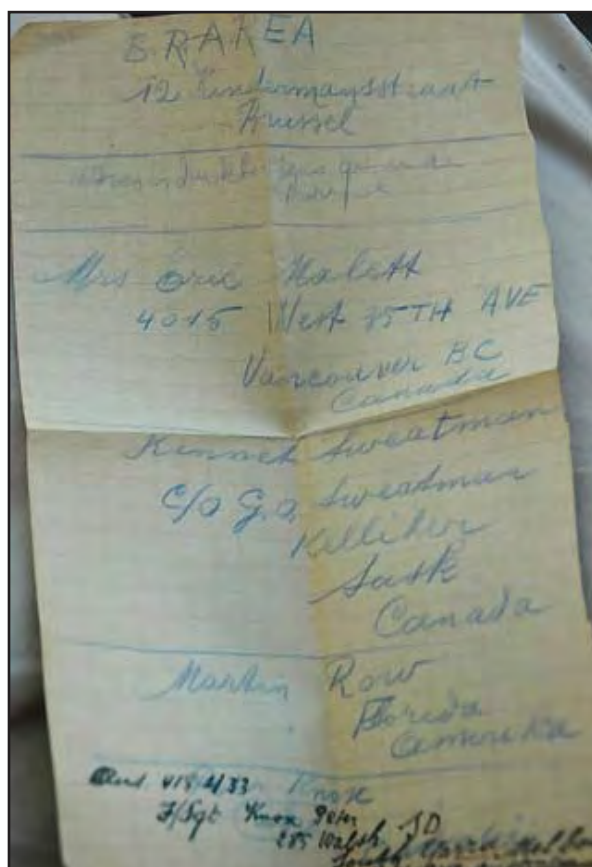


Photo taken of Peter Knox by
Resistance in 1944
Provided by Col. Neels.



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 father. 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



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.



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

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 fat. 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 fat 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 Lafili). 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 fat 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.

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 (Newberry) 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."

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 forrest. Returned by Neil Webster.





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 fiancé.
There was a younger brother Alfons (b.1927)

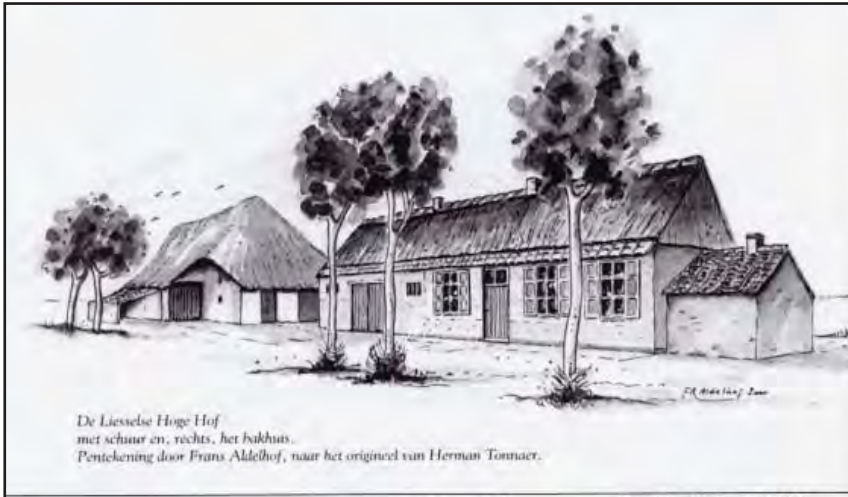


Father Constant Hannes (from St. Aloysius College in Geel (b. October 1901 died 9th May 1962) visited Peter Knox at Hoge Hof and according to PEK he accompanied him by bicycle to Turnout.

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. Newberry – 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 Leopoldsburg, 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 (Leopoldsburg) "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 flight 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 Leopoldsburg, 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 Haberfield

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 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;

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-Kiepura

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, Fl 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 Lafili 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. Newberry – 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 kia; 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

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

5) Captain Henry Griff s 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 Luijsgestel (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 Lafili, 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-Lafili 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 Lafili 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-Kiepora – June 2006

Research contributed by Kamiel Mertens 2005-2006

References also found in:

Jules Heyns' Book:

Gelenaars van alle tijden



SOME THOUGHTS FROM BELGIUM

LIZ JOHNSON

A few months ago my mother received a phone call from Jane Knox who for some time had been trying to track down my father Reg Brookes – flight Sergeant Reginald Brookes who had bailed out of a 100 Squadron Lancaster, LL887 in 1944. She wanted him and my mother Hilda to take part in the reunion that she was organizing in Brussels followed by the Memorial Dedication Ceremony In Mol-Postel, Belgium on September 2 and 3 2006.

My father had been on a mission to Dusseldorf in April 1944 when his plane was shot down as they were making for home. He had the good fortune to be picked up by Josef and Karel Hoskins, members of the Belgian underground who found him shelter and later passed him on to the Sterckx family near a small country town called Geel in Belgium.

It is at this point that my father's story becomes linked with that of Peter Knox who was also given shelter by the Sterckx family not long after they had taken my father in. My father's account of his experience in hiding says how pleased he was to have Peter's company during the long hot summer hours hiding in the cornfields. When they had to move on from the Sterckx family, they left separately and were subsequently hidden by different families but met up again in Brussels at the Hotel Metropole after the liberation and later Peter visited my father in his hometown of Newport Shropshire after the war.

I have been helping my father write his story. This is because like Jane and others I believe that these experiences are part of our recent history and should be recorded for our families and for the future as a witness to the bravery not only of young men like Peter and my father but also of those families like the Hoskins and the Sterckx who risked their lives doing what they thought was the right thing.

I was therefore delighted to be invited with my husband Clive to accompany my parents to the event in Brussels and the Memorial Dedication Ceremony in Mol-Postel. It was an opportunity to think about all of these things but it was also wonderful to see Dimpna Sterckx and her family again at Mol as well as meet members of Jane's family and others with links to this story. Our thanks go to Jane in particular but to all who were involved in the organisation of this wonderful and memorable event.

Liz Johnson
September 2006

I have an early school-day recollection of making several attempts at representing in crayon a story which had already come to form part of our family mythology. Towards the top of the picture, there was a burning aeroplane, whose distinctive tail-plane (though probably not much else) identified it as a Lancaster bomber. In the central section, there were a number of lopsided parachutes over matchstick figures, out of the mouth of one of which came a bubble, containing words along the lines of “Cripes! I think I’m going to be sick”. At some point along the ruler-drawn horizontal ground-line (a purely fortuitous element of geographical exactitude) stood a boy with a dog looking up at the parachuting airmen. Meanwhile, stationed nearby, but miraculously blind to what was going on in front of them, were grouped a cluster of smoking-barrelled tanks. Finding (like the narrator of *The Little Prince*) that the marvels of my artwork went largely unappreciated, I took umbrage with the world, renounced my artistic calling and let the story fade into the recesses of a forgetful imagination.

Whether Jane was more successful than me in drawing the story we had imbibed from earliest youth, I do not know, but what is certain is that this wonderfully (and in part tragically) simple tale of courage and human decency evidently stayed with her and became the inspiration for a Grail-like quest, co-undertaken with her own Sir Galahad, Marjan, and Sir Percival, Kamiel Mertens (master translator and researcher), and an assortment of other brave, unflagging knights of both genders and sundry nationalities, a quest which eventually culminated in all of us standing together in the very landscape where these destiny-defining deeds took place.

In the interim, through Dad’s own war memoir, among many other painstakingly garnered documents and accounts, a far more comprehensive picture had emerged of the intricate tapestry, comprising countless acts of valour, comradeship, resistance and defiance, which had made it possible not just for Dad, but for many others as well, to be returned to their families unscathed and, in due course, to become much-loved, peace-time parents to their own offspring.

Yet no amount of factual information or detailed reconstruction, however artfully crafted, can ever match the poignancy and potential for emotional resolution afforded by body-present commemoration, whether through the medium of music - Marjan’s Chopin, Phil’s Percy Grainger and Eleanor’s kindly but commanding marshalling of the boys through the Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square (Alex), The Scottish Soldier (Jerome) and the White Cliffs of Dover (Michael), and then the massed ranks of the ME846 Chorus intoning Lili Marlene, Long Way to Tipperary – plus, of course, as Aussie a rendering of Waltzing Matilda as we could muster for the Australian Consul - lubricated by fine wine and melodically enhanced by the tuneful Heeley contingent, at the resplendent Radisson in Brussels -, through the medium of word, sight and sound, at the site of the unveiled plaque in the woodlands outside Möl-Postel - the Last Post, the homily on war and peace by Father Norman, the remembrance speeches of Kamiel, the Lord Mayor and Jane - or simply through the medium of conversation, at any and all of a succession of gastronomic extravaganzas, up to, but wholly including the Six Délices cut tantalisingly short by the coach’s departure for Brussels.

Throughout the time out of time that was our Belgium weekend, with the wonderful commonality of spirit experienced and kindness encountered, the thought was prompted, insistently, of how indebted we were, not just to ‘the boy with the dog’, and to all the other valiant boys, girls, men and women (collectively represented by Dimpna Sterckx and the Stevensons, family of Captain Hamilton-Davis), who had performed their life-imperilling acts of defiance and courage, while guns and tanks lowered ever menacingly, but also to those who, through their unstintingly generous devotion to the principle of

remembrance, had provided us with this heart-warming and perspective-restoring opportunity to come back and say ‘thank you’.

POSTSCRIPT

Since the events in Belgium last year significant progress has been made in the search for Thomas Newbery and members of his family. Thomas survived internment in Stalug Luft III and returned to England and married a young woman from Lincoln, but he sadly died in June 1950 and is buried in Lincoln.

We hope to establish more details about Thomas during the coming months.

One of several other Australians featured in the original “ME846 Booklet” was Flying Officer Lyle Edward Bowes who trained as a bomb aimer with Flight Sergeant Peter Edmund Knox at RAF Penthos. Lyle Bowes flew with 207 Squadron from RAF Spilsby, Lincs and by a quirk of fate he also participated in the same Wesseling Raid as ME848.

Lyle Bowes was one of eight killed in action when their Lancaster LM578, EM-C piloted by Flying Officer T .T. Smart, DFC, crashed in the North Sea off Overflakkee, Holland on June 22, 1944. The body of Pilot Officer Bowes was washed up on the English Coast and is now buried in Cambridge City Cemetery, whilst his fellow crew members who were washed up on the Dutch Coast are buried in Holland.

DEDICATED TO THE CREW OF ME846 - BY CHRIS CARDOSE ON THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY

‘Seven young men,
Brought together by war,
Found friendship and solace,
As in the air they did soar.

So on that day (gone 60 years),
They were to fly their last,
With futures glinting pearly bright,
Their fate already cast.

Their trusty steed, an aircraft,
Well known in the air,
A Lancaster Bomber,
A sight not so rare.

Dave,Porky,Pete,Dennis, George,
Newberry, Taylor, heroes all,
As Davis kept the craft aloft,
Not knowing how fate was to fall.

Many young men flew sorties,
Each depending on the other,
Whilst families prayed silently,
For their lovers, sons and brothers.

But we who are left remember them,
And will keep them yet alive,
Through memories and happy times,
For this we continue to strive.

619 squadron were all those things,
Their lives touching others,
Continents could not divide
This true band of brothers.

‘Lest we forget’ is not an option here,
Through our new found family,
So let’s rejoice at the lives they had,
And their close camaraderie’.

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 kilometres 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 Johr den 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 eyesight 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 Bowering, 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 Belgian/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 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 Kiepora 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 Plane 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; armoured 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, Northamptonshire
Wim Govaerts	Belgian Aviation History Association Archaeological Team (BAHAAT)

Neil Webster
Paul Petersen
Dave Greenley
Koen Peeters
Cynrik de Decker
Father Ivor Billiaert

Aviation expert
Netherlands Air Force Recovery Unit
Translators from Dutch to English and visa versa
Belgian Author
Chairman, Belgian Aviation History Association Archaeological Team (BAHAAT)
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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