

**The last flight of the
“Lancaster ME846”
(Mol-Postel, June 22, 1944)
A pictorial history**



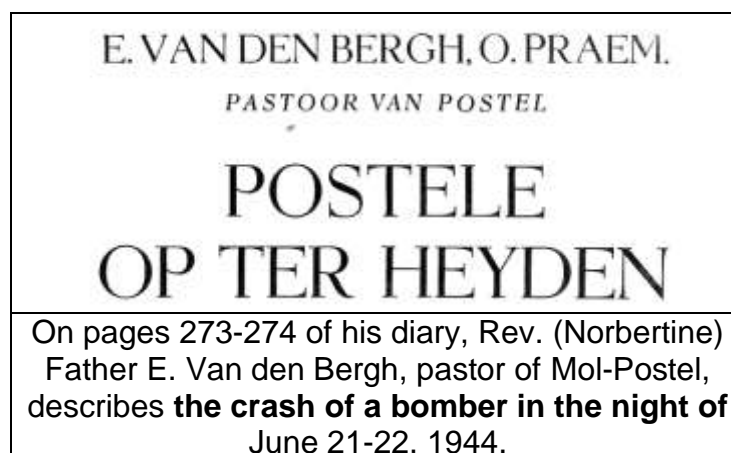
**Editing: Kamiel Mertens
Translation: Johan Claes**

**Studium Generale vzw
2016**



Crew of the **Lancaster 1 – ME846**, the first time in its final composition in front of their plane “Short Stirling” on the airport RAF-Winthorpe, 1661 Conversion Unit. *f.l.t.r.* Peter Edmund **Knox**, Thomas A. **Newberry**, W. Dennis **Belshaw**, Mark Anthony Hamilton **Davis** (pilot-commander), Leslie E.J. **Taylor**, George Harry **Moggridge**, John Ernest Ralph **Bowering**. *(photo beginning of March 1944)*

The crew in this formation did only eight missions between 19 May 1944 and the crash of 22 June 1944.



Colofon

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And the book itself was based on “Lancaster 1 – ME846 – RAF-Squadron 619” by **Jane Knox and Kamiel Mertens**, published for the unveiling of the monument at the crash site Mol-Postel (Belgium) on Sunday, 3 september 2006.

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The structure of the book – as guidance with this Pictorial History

But this Pictorial History has it's own logic!

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Introduction (K.M.)

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The crash of Lancaster ME846 at Mol-Postel, 22 June 1944 – a Pictorial History

Dear Lancaster family and other readers

Why and how this Pictorial History?

At the inauguration of the monument for the crew of Lancaster ME846 in Mol-Postel (Sunday, September, 3, 2006), we compiled a booklett about the history of the plain, the crash and the road to freedom of the crew, especially of Peter Knox, which was written in English and Dutch, resp. by Jane Knox and Kamiel Mertens.

In 2014, Kamiel Mertens wrote an extended story about the same subject, with the title “The last mission of the Lancaster ME846 – Mol-Postel, June, 22, 1944”.

It was our intention, that this extended story would also appear in an English translation, but we were not successful in doing so, mainly by time limitations of the volunteers who where involved. Therefore, we composed this **Pictorial History**, to be offered to the families of the crew members and to all other English speaking. (world-wide) By offering this for free via our website www.studiumgeneralevzw.be, we want to tell this fascinating and tragical story to the world, by using a broad selection of the available pictures, together with an extended summary of the book that appeared in Dutch.

Kamiel Mertens, president of Studium Generale vzw, made the selection of the pictures and wrote the accompanying texts in Dutch. Johan Claes (Secretary of Studium Generale) made the translations to English.

Your comments and corrections are welcomed by email:

info@studiumgeneralevzw.be .

Balen, Fall 2016

Kamiel Mertens and Johan Claes

Chapter 1. How it started

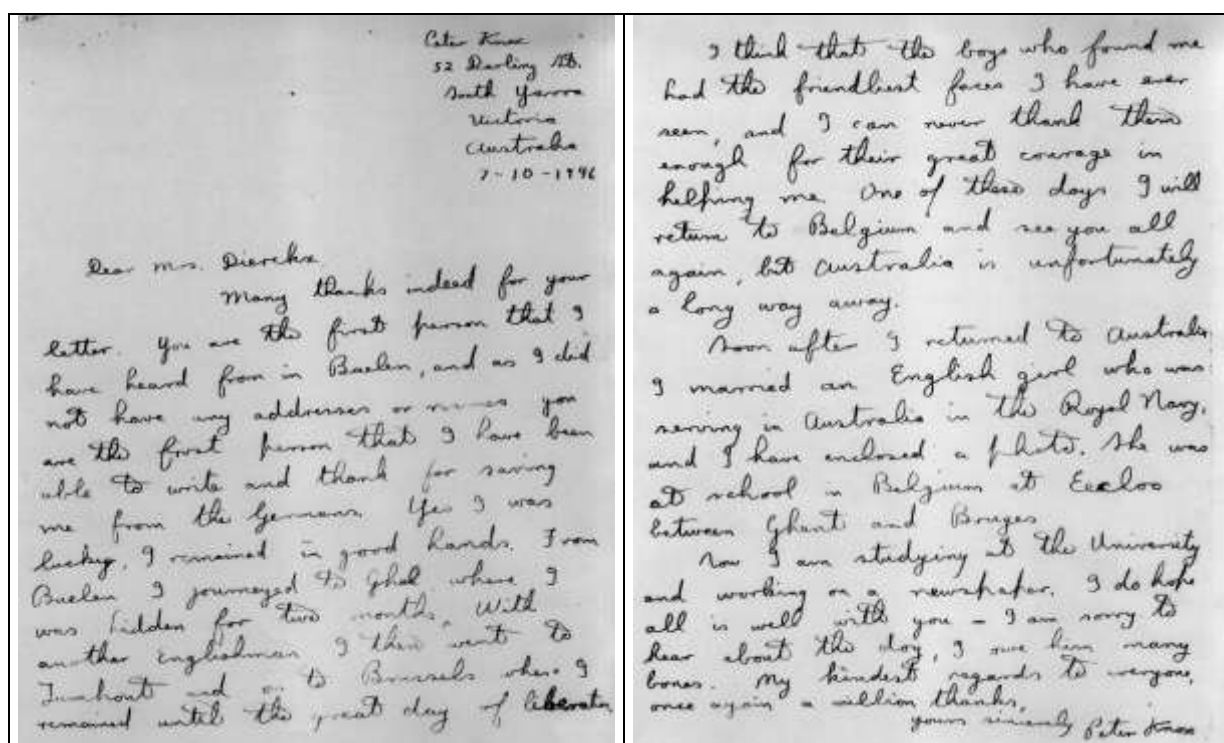
In 2000 Kamiel Mertens left his office at the K.H.K. in Geel (Kempen University College in the Antwerp-Kempen area) for his retirement. After a life as head-librarian, he chose continuation of his work by starting in 2001 a non profit associaton **Studium Generale vzw**, with the aim to promote the cultural heritage of the Kempen. He found several friends with sympathy for this initiative and together they started publishing about local and regonial history. In the past 15 years the association published no less than 55 titles and organised three important exhibitions on the First and Second World War.



In 2004 Kamiel Mertens wrote – after months of archival work – “Balén tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog”: (“Balén during the Second World War”). At the exposition on the same subject, a local elderly – Alfons Vermierdt - talked about his war experiences as a young schoolboy. One day (in June 1944), walking with his dog at Balén-Stappersdijk, he found somebody, hidden behind some bushes. The man spoke to him in English, what sounded as Chinese in his ears. He went after his father and he found out that “he” was a crew member of a British Lancaster, crashed in Postel (about 15-20 km north of Balén), some days ago. That man was the Australian RAF-volunteer Peter Knox, **bomb aimer** of Lancaster ME846. Father Van Miert went after somebody, involved with the local resistance movement “Witte Brigade” – “White Brigade”.

That was the start of a series of hiding places, safe houses and transportations,

some by car, most by bicycle. First Peter Knox was tested on his credentials: is he really a British pilot, or a German infiltrator? He proved to be “clean”. Subsequently Peter Knox was hidden in a wood, some 10-12 km east of Balén, then they accompanied him to Geel (a more experienced life line organisation dropped Knox in a farm far south from the city center, near the Albert-Canal: the Hoge Hof, at the family Sterckx-Heyns. There Peter Knox met an RAF-colleague: the Brit Reginald Brookes, shot down some weeks before Knox. Mid august 1944 they were accompanied by a local to Turnhout, for another safe house in the Kwakkelstraat with Madame Zosine Lafili. That brave woman was quite experienced: several British and American pilots passed her home for a couple of days, on their way to Brussels, Paris and Spain...and finally England, home!



With this thanking letter (written by Peter Knox on 07.10.1946 from Australia to "Dear Mrs Dierckx" in Balen), started our quest and finally the erection of the monument in Mol-Postel. Peter Knox did not write to the parents of Alfons Vermierdt, but to (the neighbour) Mrs Dierckx who originated from England, but was married with a Belgian soldier who revalidated in England after being wound during the first world war. Mrs Dierckx was asked before by the Vermierdt family to write a letter to Peter Knox, and this was his answer...

And now, in 2004, the former child of 1944, asked Kamiel Mertens to find Peter Knox or his family, if any! Miracolo: internet is a famous instrument for "man search" – in a few minutes Mertens discovered Jane Knox in the USA, a daughter of Peter Knox. A first phone call was the start of a long and complicated expedition to reconstruct the path from Mol-Postel on June, 22, 1944 to Brussels on September, 3, 1944, the day Brussels was liberated....

In May 2005, Jane Knox, her brother Paul and her husband Marian Kiepora, came to Belgium to see the places and to meet the people involved in her father's escape and hiding (in 1944). They had an overloaded program: meeting with the Sterckx-family in Geel, meeting with "the boy with the dog" (Fons Vermierdt) and the chief of the local White Brigade in Balen; visit to the family in Leopoldsborg-Immert, visit to the crash site in Mol-Postel and a conference with the lord mayor of Mol, mister Paul Roththier. Johan Claes en Kamiel Mertens from Studium Generale vzw where their guides during these days. After the meeting with the lord mayor the decision was clear: the city of Mol would construct a memorial site in the woods of Postel, near (or close to?) the crash site.



The next year, on Sunday 3 September 2006, all the families of the crew members of Lancaster ME846 gathered in Mol-Postel for a moving ceremony: the unveiling of the Lancaster monument. The local associations of war veterans, the music corps of the fire brigade and several invited personalities were present on that rainy day. The families came from far away: USA, Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain, etc... Jane Knox and her husband Marian Kiepora, owner of an air industry company in the USA, sponsored that complete weekend with base in the SAS Merrian hotel in Brussels. Jane Knox and Kamiel Mertens wrote for that occasion a brochure with the story of the Lancaster ME846 and its crew, both in Dutch and English.

Just a few days before the celebration, Kamiel Mertens got news from a BAH-historian (Belgian Aviation History Association), Wim Govaerts, telling that the Lancaster was not shot down by FLAK (Flug Abwehr Kanone – anti-aircraft artillery) as we all the time believed, but by a German night fighter: major von Bonin! Even the original report, written in German by von Bonin about his nightly mission of 21-22

June 1944, was available! Von Bonin was very precise and detailed about the shooting of Lancaster ME846.

That story had an open end: a lot of questions were still unanswered! So Kamiel Mertens went on with his search in war archives and other military sources. Members of the BAHA, working together under the name "Plane Hunters", went on with their metal detectors. A local amateur-researcher Koen Peeters, discovered the most likely crater in the woods, some hundreds meters from the expected crash site. Intense investigation with detectors and heavy equipment brought confirmation: parts of the Lancaster and the personal stuff from the pilot, with (registered) serial numbers, have been discovered.

After the crash of 22 June 1944 only six crew members of the seven have landed, be it alive or dead. The day after the crash a German team - "Bergungstruppe" - came to Postel. They collected the big and small parts of the Lancaster: Germany was in need of raw material. From the pilot, captain Davis, there was not a single trace. It is specialists opinion that the body of the pilot, who stayed at the control stick of the Lancaster to allow his men to bail out, was completely pulverised, due to the very high temperatures from the explosion of the bombload and the thousands of liters of kerosine. (The Lancaster was shot on it's way to the target!). So, further search for remainings of the pilot is meaningless.

So, the quest for "the airman Peter Knox," started because "the boy with the dog" Fons Vermierdt, liked to meet again the man he discovered in June 1944, is completed: not Peter Knox (he died 21 May 1998) but his daughter Jane and his son Paul and other members from the Knox-family, have met Fons Vermierdt and a memorial site has been created in Mol-Postel.

Vermierdt died in August 2009. But the story of the last flight of Lancaster ME846 has been written and published, and the Lancaster family has now a place to remember.

During the Second World War over 5.000 planes crashed on Belgian territory, Germans as well as Britain, Americans, Canadians, Australians, etc... Most of them are anonymous – only on places with people interested in history, initiatives are taken to commemorate and celebrate the daring young airman who lost their lives in Belgium. Lancaster ME846 is only just one of the 5.000... exemplary.

Not only Mol-Postel has a memorial site for the Lancaster ME846, also in England itself, at the Newark Air Museum in Nottinghamshire the Knox-family unveiled a commemorative plaque for the crew of ME846, before the monument in Mol-Postel.

Chapter 2. Jane Knox and her search for Lancaster ME846

After the request of Fons Vermierdt, Kamiel Mertens started his search at Internet and found rather easy www.knoxetal.com (Knox et alii), with the complete story of the raid and the crash of Lancaster ME846.

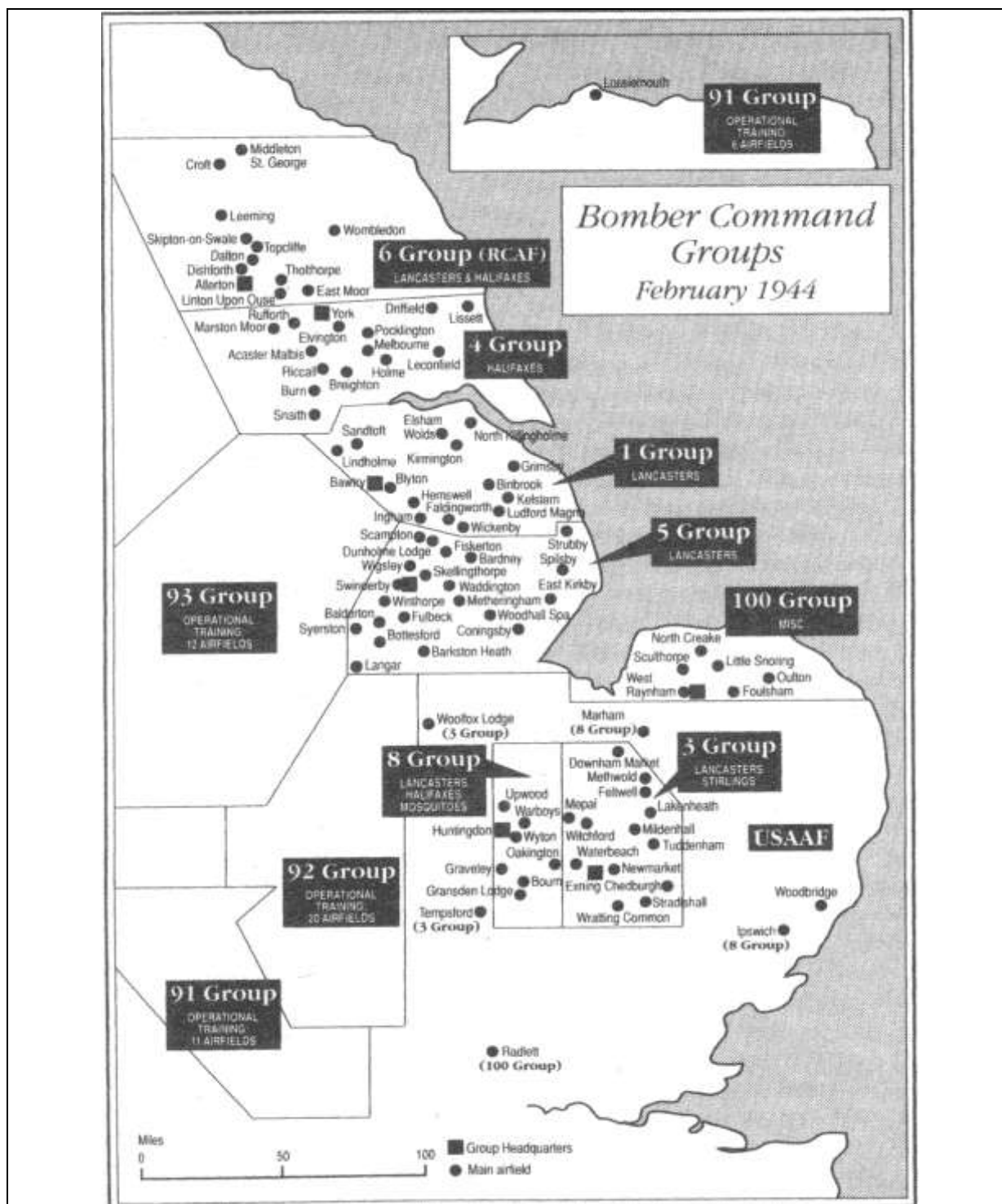


Jane Knox and her husband Marjan Kiepura - Jane is the daughter of the late Peter Knox - Jane and Marjan own a company, selling parts for aviation industry. They travel a lot around the world...

Jane Knox called Kamiel Mertens and that was the start of a long relationship. Both worked for the same goal: find out more about what happened to ME846 and its crew and to discover everybody, involved in the rescue and hiding of Peter Knox, her late father.

At the time, Jane was already organising a memorial in the U.K., to honor the crew of Lancaster ME846. It took place at Newark Air Museum, in June 2005, few days before Jane and Marjan came to Belgium for a first visit.

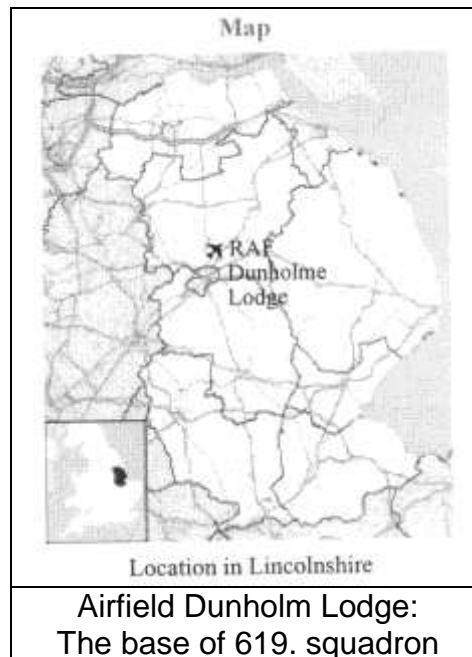
Chapter 3. RAF 619. squadron on Dunholme Lodge



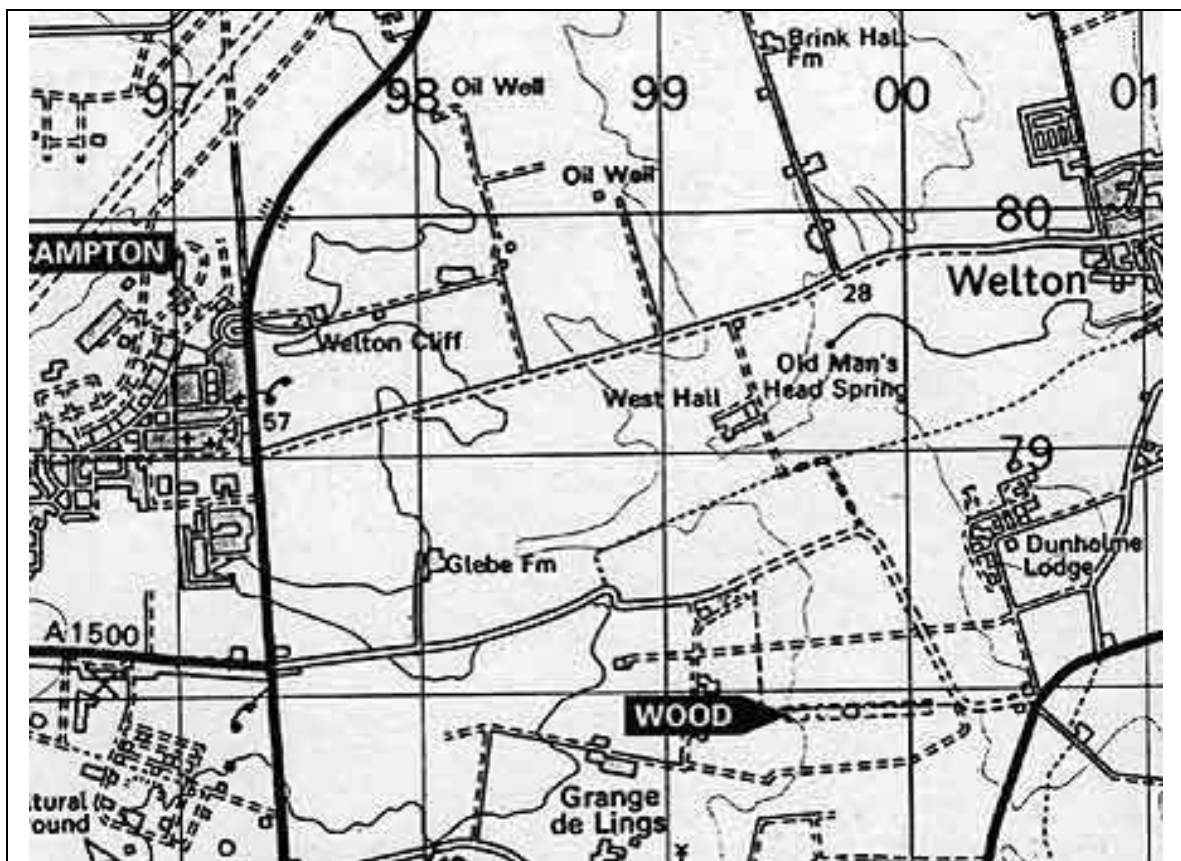
Source: Denis Richards: "R.A.F. Bomber Command in the Second World War", p. 189.

R.A.F. Dunholme Lodge – the airfield for 619. squadron

(Source: "Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia")



From the series of images of Dunholme Lodge on Google, we selected some characteristic images.



A second map on which you see Dunholme Lodge on the right side.



Entrance gate and guardpost of the small airfield in the U.K.

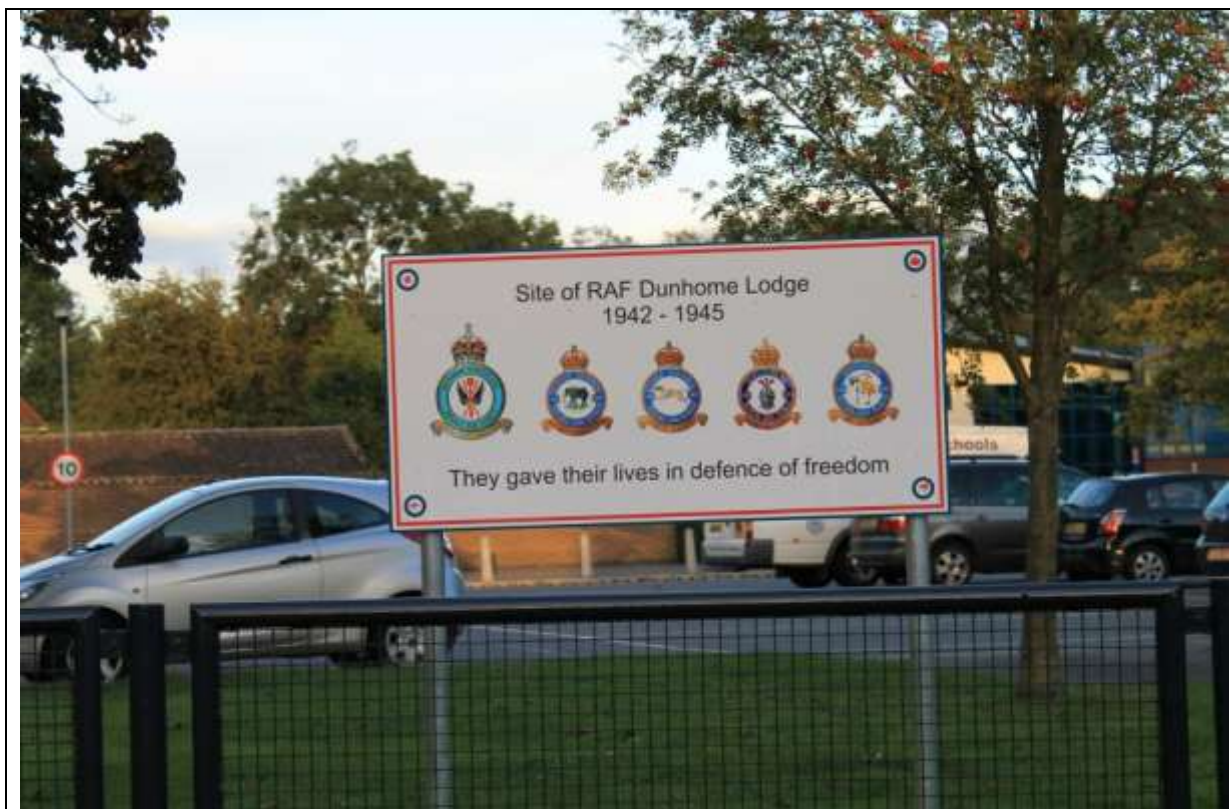


Exemple of the hangars to hide and protect the Lancasters for German bombers



The crew of a bomber returned safe without casualties and gathers around the old stove to warm themselves.





The war airfield Dunholme Lodge is now in use for agriculture.
See the shield of every squadron.

The seven crew members of Lancaster ME846

(in alphabetical order)

Sergeant W. Dennis “Geordie” Belshaw - 1808996 R.A.F., mechanic



Family Belshaw: f.l.t.r.: Vera, Dennis, his wife Lettie, mother of Anne, niece Christine Cardoso.



Dennis Belshaw
(prisoner of war after the crash)

Pilot-Officer John Ernest Ralph (“Porky”) Bowering
J-88199 RCAF (Royal Canadian Air Force) – rear gunner



J.E.R. Bowering (died in crash)

Pilot-Officer Mark Anthony Hamilton Davis
74023 RAF-VR, pilot - commander.



Pilot-captain M.A.H. Davis
(M.I.A. = missing in action - presumed K.I.A.: killed in action: died in crash)

Flight-Sergeant Peter Edmund Knox

A418433 RAAF (Royal Australian Air Force), bomber



All Peter Knox. He survived the crash and escaped by lifeline.
the right picture dates from 1988. (thanks to Frans Maes)

Sergeant George Harry Moggridge

1896779 R.A.F.-VR, back gunner



George Harry Moggridge
(died in crash)



His gravestone at the park of
honor Schoonselhof cemetery
at Antwerp.

Sergeant Thomas A. Newberry

1602063 R.A.F., radio-operator.



Thomas A. Newberry
(from Dagenham, Essex-U.K.)
(prisoner of war after crash)

Flight Sergeant Leslie E.J. "Tag" Taylor

1585057 R.A.F., navigator



Leslie E.J. Taylor
(prisoner of war after crash)

Chapter 4. The fatal raid of 21-22 June 1944 on Wesseling

Army statistics confirm that this raid was one of the most tragical for the RAF in 1940-1944. On the website of the “207. Squadron Royal Air Force Association” we find the report: “The Wesseling Raid of 21/22 June 1944”. There we read: “...*Haslam’s own analysis of the Bomber Command War Diaries*” for major raids which had a casualty rate of 10% or more, from February 1942 onwards, (...) shows that Wesseling on 21/22 June 1944 was the worst in terms of chop rate: **37 planes lost, or 27,8 % of the total.**”

Further on, it reports: “On Wesseling, according to Francis Mason, “it was clear from a study of the crew’s post raid reports, the number of sightings of German aircraft and the almost continuous warnings by the Monica equipment, that a large number of enemy fighters had penetrated the stream from the rear and then steadily worked their way forwards, shooting down bombers as they went.: **619. sqn at the rear lost six out of sixteen** – 44. sqn just ahead also lost six of sixteen – 83. sqn Pathfinder Lancasters were at the front and lost (only) two out of ten!”

(...)

“The target (Wesseling factories) was expected to be clear but was covered in 10/10 cloud. Route in and out heavily attacked by fighters from and beyond the enemy coast. Target FLAK predicted and very accurate.”

(...)

“Post raid reconnaissance showed that only slight damage was caused to the oil plant and this is borne out by a local German report which adds that 15 Germans, 5 foreign workers and 1 prisoner of war were killed in the nearby town of Wesseling. But a secret German report, quoted in the “British Official History” (vol IV, p.323), records a 40% production loss at Wesseling after this raid. It is possible that the loss was only of short duration.”

The ‘Diaries’ of Bomber Command report in addition that on July, 18-19, 1944 a new raid to Wesseling was performed by 194 planes of the groups 1, 6 and 8. That raid was a great success, thanks to the excellent marking of the targets by the Pathfinders. Approximately 1.000 high-explosive bombs were dropped in the target zone and in 20 minutes, 20% of the installations were destroyed.



Wesseling, close to the Rhine, between Cologne and Bonn.

The RAF-Lancasters had to arrive in the night of June, 21-22 1944 from the West...



Air view of the center of Wesseling before the bombardment. At the left, a small part of the Rhine can be seen.



Anti-aircraft artillery (FLAK) on the fields around Wesseling



Picture taken during the bombardment from 22 June 1944
At the bottom of this picture, another Lancaster can be seen.



The day after each raid an
“R.A.F.-scout” took pictures of the
damage, caused by the
bombardment.



A picture of Wesseling, the day after the raid.



FLAK – Flugabwehr-Kanone – an 88-mm gun, capable to turn and go up and down in all directions.

This gun could be mounted on a truck to make it mobile.

Chapter 5. Lancaster ME846 shot down on it's way to Wesseling

The 619 squadron with Lancaster ME846 started from Dunholme Lodge on 21.06.1944 at 23.01 hrs for a raid on Wesseling, to destroy the factory for synthetic fuell (Germany) with a bombload as follows: **-1x4.000 lb bom + 16x500 lb bombs.** In total 133 Lancasters and 6 Mosquitos started for Germany.

Even before the Lancasters reached their target, they came under heavy fire, not only from FLAK (Flug-Abwehr-Kanone - anti-aircraft artillery) but also by German nightfighters, already warned by their own radarposts, started from airfields in occupied Belgium (a.o. Sint-Truiden) and The Netherlands.

No less than 37 Lancasters (6 from 619. squadron) where shot down, some above The Netherlands, others above Belgian territory.

Lancaster ME846, with pilot captain Davis and the crewmembers was hit at engine nr 4: the extreme right engine. The pilot – feeling he was going to loose his machine – ordered to leave te plane: “Bail out!”. Pilot Davis had serious trouble holding the plane horizontal, to let his man jump in the dark night. Two man (Bowering and Moggridge) at the back side did not answer: already being killed by the bullets. Four managed to leave the plane (Belshaw POW, Newberry POW, Taylor, POW, Knox, escaped) – the pilot was not able to jump. (Davis: Missing in action, supposed Killed in action)

Still in the air, at about 3.000 m altitude, the plane exploded and thousands of small and large parts fell to the earth. The nose/cockpit fell near the Belgian-Dutch border, on Belgian territory, as we later found out.

The local parish-priest, father E. Van den Bergh from Postel Norbertine abbey, wrote in his secret diary “Postele op ter heyden” that the main pieces came down near the border at the old road to Bladel (Holland). Due to the bombload and the kerosine (the Lancaster was on it's way to the target) the explosion was so heavy that miles from there all windows broke. Pilot's body was never found.

As usual after such airfight German troops were alerted and searched the Postel woods for the crew. They found the dead bodies in the rear section, 4 survivors (1 of them crippled by leg-injury) and 2 crew members were missing: the pilot and nr 7.

Number **seven - the bombaimer** Peter Knox – managed to stay out of their hands and started to walk direction south. By day he hided himself in the woods and during the night he walked south, hoping to meet somebody with patriotic feelings.

Chapter 6. The adventures of Peter Knox – The boy with the dog

The second day after the crash a school boy walked with his dog in Balen-Reisberg, some 15 km south of Postel. The dog sniffed and sniffed... and found Peter Knox, hidden behind some bushes.



Alfons Vermierdt (kneeled down) with his dog Johnnie, his father Jozef and mother Julia Kemps, grandmother Theresia Kemps-Dierckx (picture probably from 1946)



Victor Neels, chief of the Balen' resistance group White Brigade (Here in his colonel-uniform).

The boy didn't understand English and went for his father. The father understood that the man was an RAF-airman looking for a safe place and "pilot help". He knew somebody in the village with (supposed) connections to a local resistance group "the White Brigade". From then on, it went very quick: in the evening of the same day, they came to pick up Peter Knox. He could spend the night in a wood called "Immert", at Leopoldsburg.

The chief of the Balen' White Brigade was Vic Neels, a young student of 18-19 years. After the war he joined the Belgian army and became a full colonel.

On the photo left (some 50 years after the war), colonel Neels receives an award from the German authorities, for his command period of the military Nato-Camp of

Vogelsang in the German Eifel region.



Peter Knox received in Immert food and shelter from an aunt of Neels.
Visit (18.06.2005) to aunt Josefien Timmermans-Gombeer in Leopoldsborg-Immert
f.l.t.r.: Raf Timmermans, Anna Neels-Voss, Maria Timmermans-Henrickx, François
Timmermans, col. Vic Neels. Aunt Josefien is sitting.

Chapter 7. Search for all actors – reconstruction

After (7.1.) Balen-Stappersdijk (Vermiert family) and (7.2.) Leopoldsborg-Immert (Josefien Timmermans-Gombeer), the next “station” was...

7.3. Geel-Liessel – the farm “Hoge Hof”, family Sterckx-Heyns

A few days later – after proving Peter Knox was not a German infiltrator but a real RAF-man – they brought Knox from Leopoldsborg-Immert to the city of Geel, about 17 km west of Balen. The local lifeline-group – guided by mrs Jeanne Leemans-Schlesser – organised a safe house for Peter Knox: the farm Hoge Hof, north of the Albert-Canal, far south of Geel-city center. The family Sterckx-Heyns had already a RAF-guest: Reginald Brookes, some weeks before crashed at Retie, about 12 km NE of Geel.

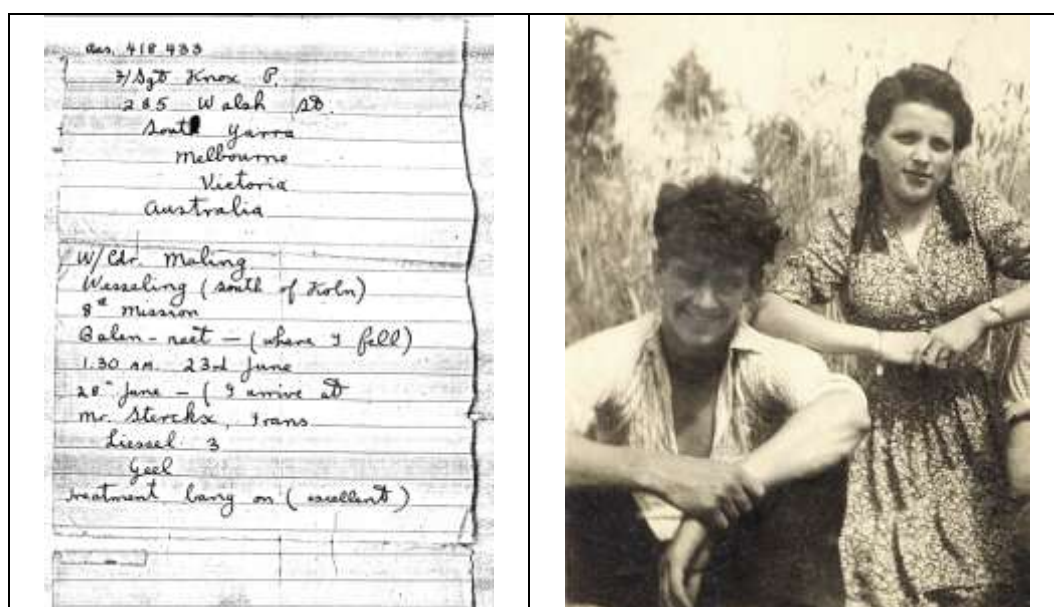


The lifeline organisation at Geel had a female chief: mrs Jeanne Leemans-Schlesser. She had contact with several families at Geel, willing to hide allied airmen for the German hunters. Jeanne introduced Peter Knox at the Sterckx-family.

(Frans Maes – grandson of Sterckx-Heyns – writes in his mail of 21.05.2013 – “Jeanne is here in British military uniform, given to her by a British soldier.”)



The couple Frans Sterckx – Clementine Heyns from the farm Hoge Hof



Left: Note from Peter Knox, stating that he arrived on June, 28 1944 at the family Sterckx-Heyns in Geel-Liessel n° 3. This was thus six days after the crash.

Right: Peter Knox and the farmers daughter Dimpna Sterckx





Peter Knox, Dimpna Sterckx,
Reg. Brookes



Jules Sterckx and Peter Knox



Peter Knox and Marcel Maes



Peter Knox on a bike,
In the background Jules
Sterckx



f.l.t.r.: Frans Sterckx, Jules Sterckx, Marcel Maes, Rev. Constant
Hannes, Peter Knox, Dimpna Sterckx, Alfons Sterckx,
Clementine Sterckx-Heyns

The **Sterckx-Heyns** family:

Father Frans Sterckx was a farmer, horse breeder and bee-keeper.

Mother Clementine Heyns

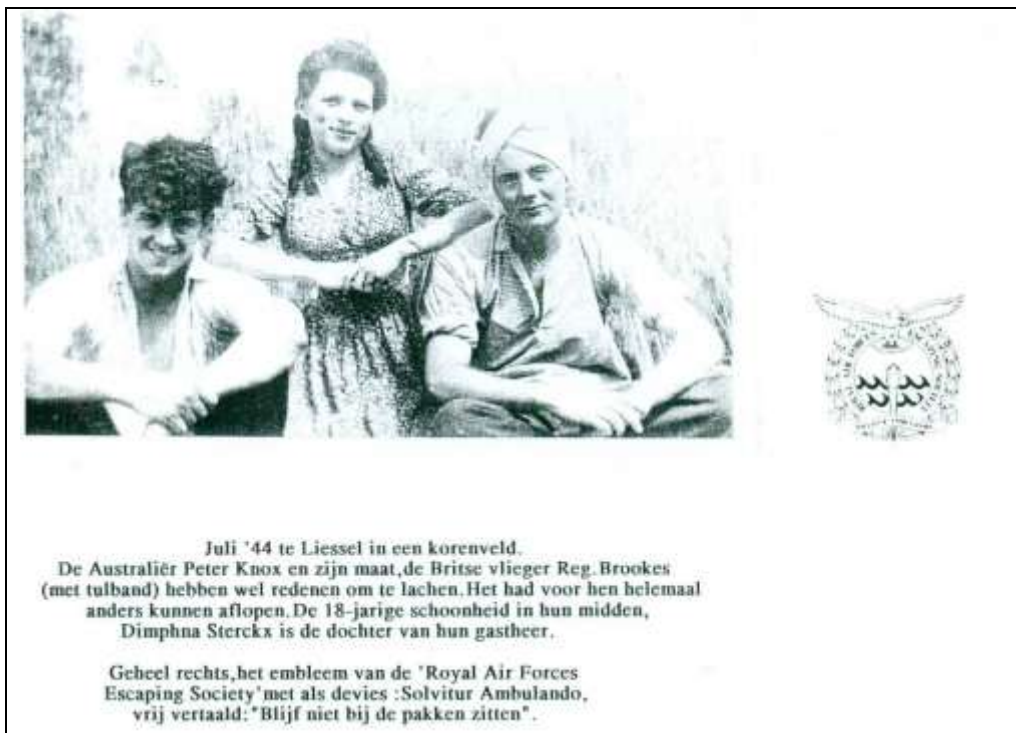
They had three children:

-1- son Jules Sterckx, born on 30.11.1922, went in the 1950's to the Belgian colony Congo as a farmer on a coffee plantation. He died in Kenya on 13.04.1957, due to complications after a car accident.

-2- daughter Dimpna, born on 24.04.1926, married with the boy next door Marcel Maes, on 19.07.1947. They gave birth to three children, one of which was Frans Maes who was also present at the unveiling of the Plaque in Mol-Postel in 2006 and assisted in 2014 with the report "De laatste vlucht van Lancaster ME846".

-3- The third child, son Alfons, was born on 12.11.1927. (He was thus 17 years (old) when Peter Knox arrived in the familiy.) (...) He lives now in an elderly house in Geel.

For the book "*Gelenaars van alle tijden*" (pag. 321vv) Jules Heyns wrote a text about the farm "Hoge Hof" and the hiding of two "crashed" airmen, Brookes en Knox.




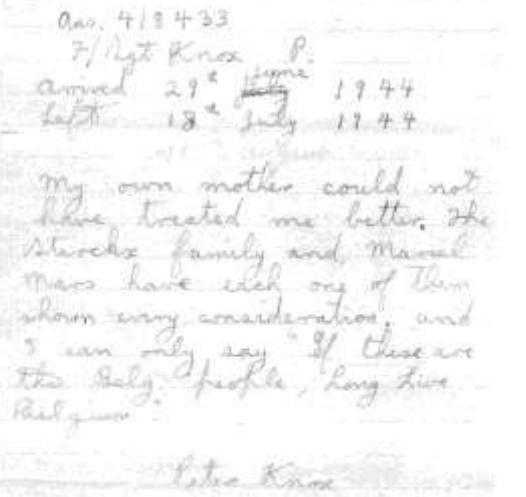


Rev. Constant Hannes, catholic priest and teacher at the Saint-Aloysius college in Geel, came regularly to the Hoge Hof for Peter Knox, also catholic, to hear his confession and to give him the Holy Communion

Some notes from Brookes and Knox about their stay in farm “Hoge Hof”:

| | |
|--|--|
| | <p>° 1577901 F/S (Flight Sergeant) Reginald Brookes 80, Upper Bat (?) Newport Shropshire England</p> <p>A/C H. Dusseldorf 22/03/1944 (raid where he was shot down) F/L? Jawers (?) Retie until 1/6/1944 Arrived Geel 1/6/1944 By Mr Frans Sterckx Liessel N° 3 Geel Conditions: excellent</p> <p>(A similar note from Peter Knox is shown above.)</p> |
|--|--|

And in Geel we discovered the following note from Reginald Brookes and Peter Knox, written during their hiding at Hoge Hof in 1944:

| | |
|--|---|
|  <p>15577901 F/Sgt Brookes R. Arrived 1st June 1944 Left 17th July 1944 Nursed like a baby Marcel Maes Juul & the Sterckx family confirmed beyond doubt the bravery & hospitality of the Belgian people. Ik ben u zeer dankbaar. Reginald Brookes</p> | <p>15577901 F/Sgt Brookes Reginald (repeats earlier note) "Nursed like a baby – Marcel Maes, Juul (?) the Sterckx Family confirmed beyond doubt the bravery & hospitality of the Belgian people. Ik ben u zeer dankbaar." (signed: Reginald Brookes)</p> |
|  <p>Aus. 418433 F/Sgt Knox P. Arrived 29th June 1944 Left 18th July 1944 My own mother could not have treated me better. The Sterckx family and Marcel Maes have each one of them shown every consideration, and I can only say "If these are the Belg. people, Long Live Belgium!" Peter Knox</p> | <p>Aus 418433 F/Sgt Knox P. (repeats earlier note) "My own mother could not have treated me better. The Sterckx-family and Marcel Maes have each one of them shown every consideration, and I can only say: "If these are the Belgian people: Long Live Belgium!" (signed: Peter Knox)</p> |

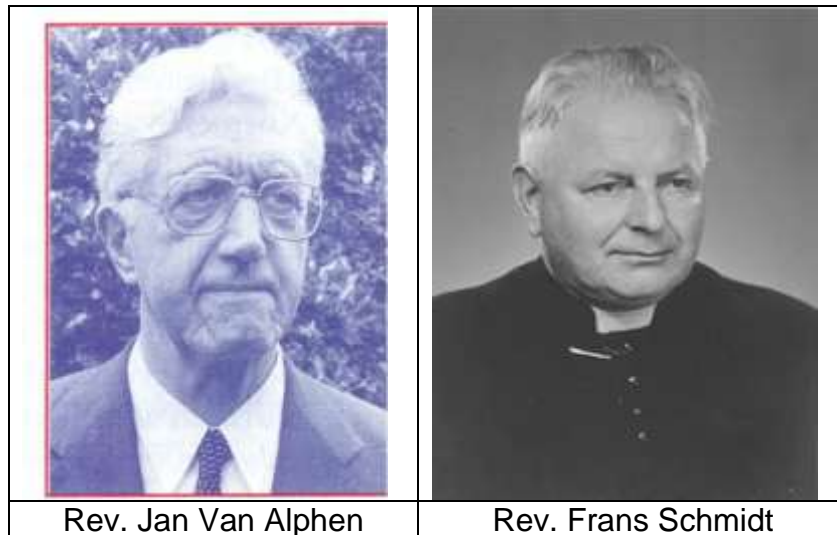
After the allied invasion in Normandy on June, 6, 1944, the transfer of airmen to the Pyrenees was far more difficult, and finally stopped completely: travelling to the south of France was impossible. There was therefore an increasing number of airmen, waiting in Belgium, with an increased risk of detection by the Germans. They had to wait for the liberation of Belgium (with the liberation of Brussels by the British army on September, 3, 1944).

Nevertheless, within Belgium, people were moved by the Lifeline, and half of August 1944, Reginald Brookes and Peter Knox moved from Geel to Turnhout.

7.4. Turnhout Kwakkelstraat – Zosine Verstraeten-Lafili

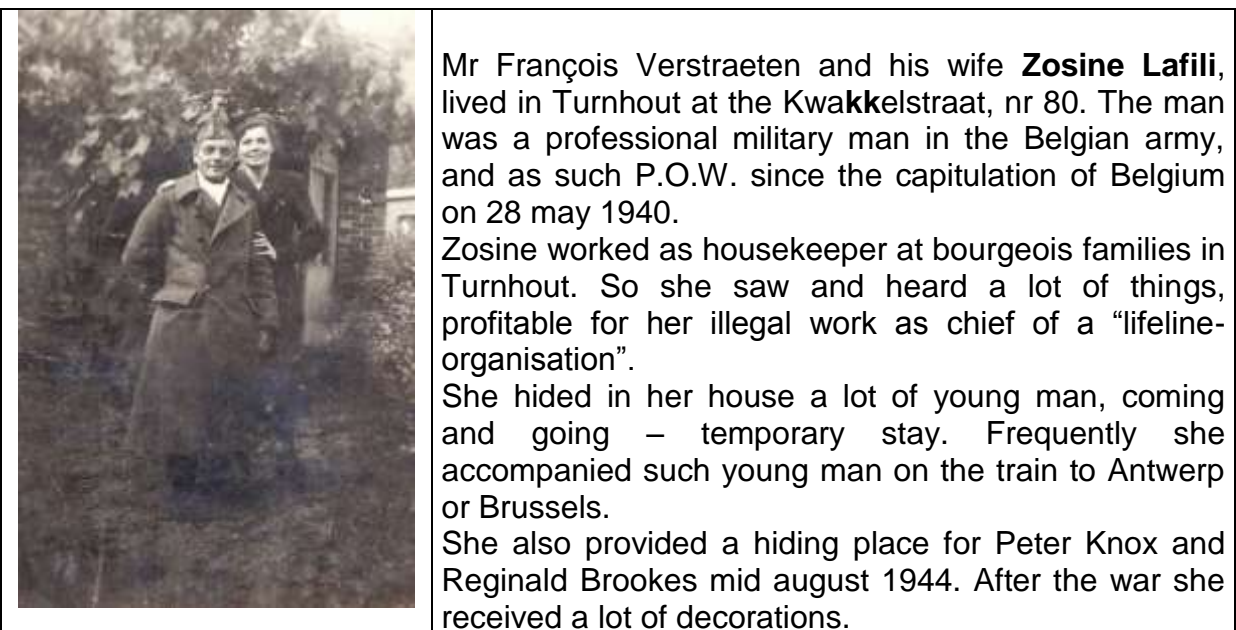
The next safe house is in Turnhout (Kwakkelstraat) with Mrs Zosine Lafili (a very uncommon name in Belgium.) The road from Geel to Turnhout was a real challenge: about 15 km on a bicycle by an untrained young men, over bad roads...!

“A young catholic priest was my guide”



Two priests, respectively working at a technical school and a college in Geel, where active in the “lifeline”, at least for moral support for the “fugitives” and for providing safe houses.

First Reginald Brookes on 10 august 1944 – accompanied by “a young priest” as he said, – went to Turnhout on bicycle. After just one night at Lafili’s place, two man of the lifeline brought him to Brussels. Peter Knox went to Turnhout on 11 august, accompanied by Jules Sterckx. On 18 august he was brought to Brussels too.



7.5. Brookes and Knox in Brussels (18 aug. - 3 sept. 1944)

Brookes and Knox are again together and they stay together till 3 september, day of the liberation of Brussels by British troops.

At the Metropole hotel they met officers, responsible for repatriation of allied RAF-men who were shot down.

Excursion : Pro and contra Lifeline...

The **British S.O.E.** (Special Operations Executive) dropped secret agents in Belgium to organise and assist, also financially, the local initiatives of lifeline and resistance movements.

A young man from Schaffen (near Diest) **François Beckers**, was a Belgian professional soldier, taken P.O.W. by the Germans and released in December 1940. In October 1941 he decided to go to England. With some companions they travelled through France and over the Pyrenees. Captured by Spanish police on 5 december 1941, he was imprisoned in the P.O.W.-camp Miranda. After British diplomatic interventions, he was released and went – after some weeks in Gibraltar - to England. He arrived on 10 May 1942, two years after the beginning of the war. He was candidate for the British S.O.E. In Aldershot he was trained on weapons, parachuting, close combat, survival, spying technics, etc. Parachuted in Belgium he was accompanied by a radioman, capable to send and receive messages in morse-code.



Beckers was several times dropped in Belgium and, after weeks or months of clandestine work - exfiltrated for England. He organised lifeline etappes, and trained local resistance movements to use handweapons, to avoid German patrols, to use dynamite for sabotage, etc. With each dropping, he brought a lot of money with him to support the living costs of resistance members during hiding. Beckers was several times in the Kempen region (Mol, Balen, etc) for his actions. Beckers and his colleagues had to be alert every day, avoiding the attention of the German counter-espionage. If the Germans arrested a spy, it was a dead-sentence!

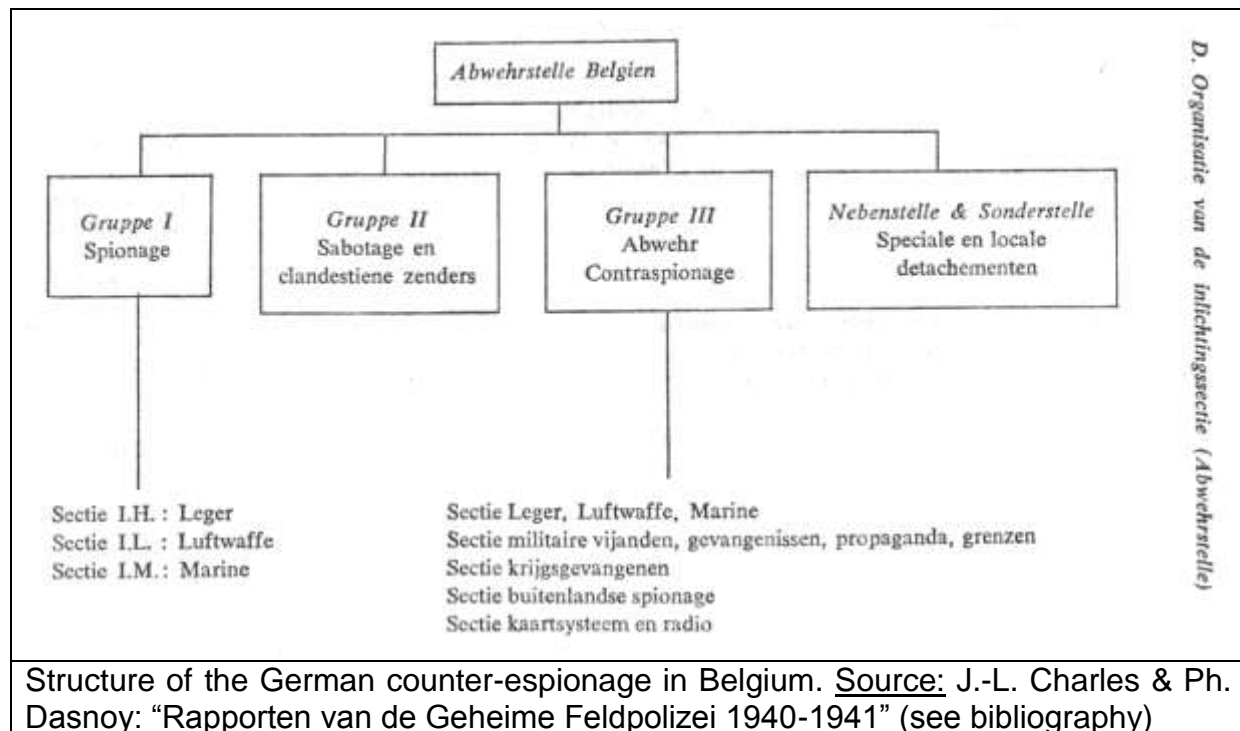
This photo shows Beckers, in 1945 after the war, congratulated by Omer Van Audenhoven, honorary minister.

In the study by Frans Kluiters: "Dutch agents 1940-1945" (new version, September 2008), we found following identification:

BECKERS, François: 19140105 Schaffen (Belgium) – 19800519 Diest (Belgium); Verstrepen group; SOE agent; wireless operator; earlier missions in Belgium; 19440921/22 (near Velp, Noord-Brabant); returned; unsuccessful new mission 19441216 – 19450517; new mission with Bufkens and Grégoir; infiltrated(50) by boat 1945.02.06/07; overrun 1945.04.18: @ code name: GEUZE/GUEUZE; field name Paul VERHEUL; Frans de BELG.(51)

See www.nisa-intelligence.nl/PDF-bestanden/KluitersDAG2foto.pdf

...versus the German Counter-espionage (Abwehrstelle)



Chapter 8. Jane & Marjan Knox-Kiepura in Belgium, June 2005

After the unveiling of a plaque in Newark in June 2005, Jane Knox, her brother Paul and her husband Marjan Kiepura came to Belgium to meet all people who were involved in the rescue and the hiding of her father Peter Knox in 1944, and to visit the places he was hidden at that time. Their program was overloaded!

Program for the visit of Jane and Marjan Knox-Kiepura and her brother Paul Knox to Geel – Balen – Immert – Mol/Postel, Saturday 18 & Sunday 19 June 2005

Hosts: Kamiel Mertens and Johan Claes

Saturday June, 18

14.00 h: **Geel**, arrival by Taxi at meeting point **Geel-Center: Church of Sint-Amandus**

Meeting with **Jules Heyns and his wife** (at his home); he guides us to the former location of the **Hoge Hof** in Geel-Liessel – afterwards: visit to **Dimpna and Alfons Sterckx** (daughter and son of the “Hoge Hof” family Sterckx-Heyns)

16.30: To **Balen** -visit to **Alfons Vermierdt** and his wife – Alfons guides us to the place where he “discovered” the hidden **Peter Knox** in June 1944: (Balen-**Stappersdijk**)

18.00: Church of Sint-Andreas in Balen: **Col. Vic Neels** guides us and shows (at **Immert**, location: auntie of Vic) the hiding place of Peter Knox, end of June 1944.

19.00: back to **hotel “SAS-Radisson”** in Antwerp-Center.

Sunday June, 19

11.00 h: -**Mol-Postel (abbey)**: meeting point: the main entrance of the abbey –arrival by taxi of **Jane, Marjan and Paul**; –meeting with Mol’s **Lord Mayor Paul Rotthier** (and his wife); **Col. Victor Neels** (and his wife); **Alfons Vermierdt** (and his wife); **Johan Claes** and **Kamiel Mertens**; -short visit to the **abbey-church** and **refreshment** at the “Beiaard” –visit to the **Lancaster crash-site** of June 22, 1944 (guided by the Lord Mayor)

+13.30: -**group-lunch** at the restaurant: “**Postelse Hofstee**”

+17.00 h: back to **Antwerp-Airport**.

Balen, 06.06.2005 – Kamiel Mertens



On Saturday 18 and Sunday 19 June 2005 Jane Knox with her brother Paul and husband Marjan Kiepura came to Belgium. They were guided by Johan Claes and Kamiel Mertens from Studium Generale vzw and had meetings with the Lord Mayor of Mol: mr Paul Rotthier.

f.l.t.r.: Paul Rotthier, Frankie Vermierdt (son of Alfons), Josepha Vermierdt-Aerts (wife of Alfons), Lea Vermierdt-Berghmans (daughter in law), Jane Knox-Kiepura, Alfons Vermierdt, Kamiel Mertens. Behind Alfons: Paul Knox and Marjan Kiepura. (picture: main entrance of the abbey Mol-Postel, 19.06.2005)



Fons Vermierdt (anno 1944 the "boy with the dog", here in 2005), Jane Knox and her brother Paul Knox



(2005) The group walks through the woods of Postel – searching for marks of the crash site of June, 22 1944.



Dimpna Sterckx, daughter of the Hoge Hof (Geel, 18.06.2005)



Marjan Kiepura, Alfons Sterckx, Jane Knox, Dimpna Sterckx and Paul Knox (Geel, 18.06.2005)



Paul Knox, Dimpna Sterckx, Jane Knox, Jules Heyns, Alfons Sterckx (Geel, 18.06.2005)



Luc Sterckx, Frans Maes, Dimpna Sterckx, Jan Maes, Jules Heyns, Alfons Sterckx (Geel, 18.06.2005)



Jan Maes, Frans Maes, Dimpna Sterckx, Jules Heyns, Luc Sterckx, Alfons Sterckx, Kamiel Mertens, Jane and Paul Knox (Geel, 18.06.2005)



Marie-Christine Maes, Jan Maes, Frans Maes, Dimpna Sterckx, Paul Knox and Jane Knox (Geel, 18.06.2005)



Left: Pine wood in Mol-Postel (19.06.2005) - Right: Paul Rotthier, Lord Mayor of Mol (Postel is a parish of Mol). The Lord Mayor arranged the construction and financing of the monument in Mol-Postel.



Marjan Kiepura is searching at the crash site (june 2005)



Alfons Vermierdt at the sluice in Mol-Postel (known as the Maat , june 2005)



Baily bridge, constructed by British troops after the war, at the end of 1944.



Jane Knox and Alfons Vermierdt in a grass land near Stappersdijk (Balen), where Alfons found Peter Knox on June, 23 1944.

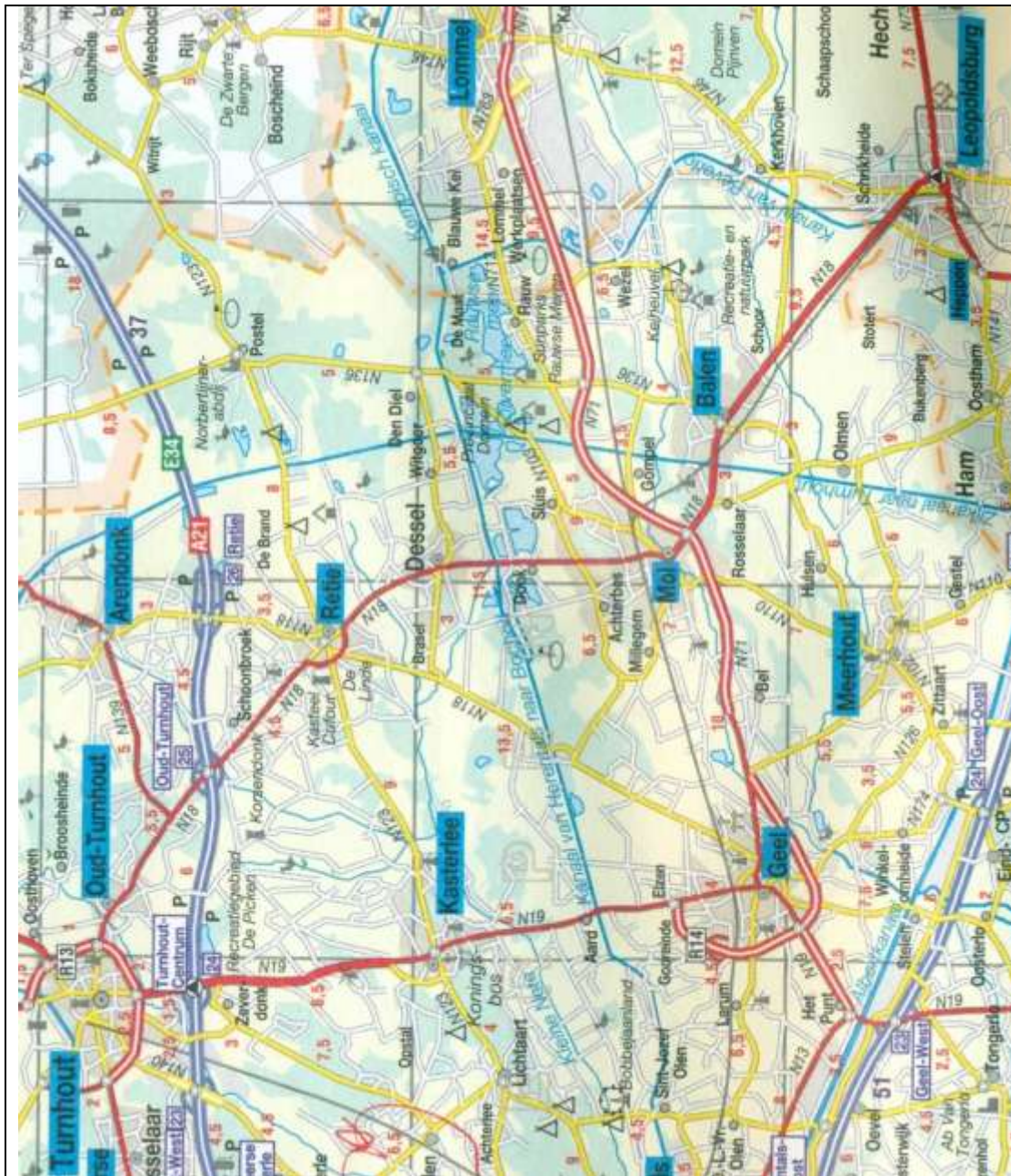
Peter Knox did not mention Alfons in his report – maybe he did not notice the boy. Alfons went for his father, and he is the first person, mentioned by Peter.



Paul Knox
(19.06.2005)



f.l.t.r.: Kamiel Mertens, Jane Knox-Kiepure, Paul Knox,
Anna Neels-Voss and her husband Vic Neels (18.06.2005)



Part of the road map of Belgium, anno 2010. This section represents the region where Peter Knox was moved from June, 22, to August, 18, 1944.

What about Reginald Brookes?

Since the war, he came several times back to Belgium because he never forgot what the Sterckx-family and other people in Geel had done for him, risking their own life!



In 2004 Reginald Brookes came to Belgium, to visit his guest family Sterckx-Heyns in Geel.



Reginald Brookes with Dimpna Sterckx, daughter of the guest family Sterckx-Heyns. (this photo in 2004)

Reginald Brookes died on saturday 3 may 2014 in Stoke-on-Trent (U.K.).



In the R.A.F.-church St.-Clement Danes in Londen this plaque was unveiled on June, 21, 1981 in commemoration to all those who risked their lives during WO II to save allied airman who were shot down. (Source: M. der Kinderen: "Halifax EY-S keerde niet terug", pag.95.)

And what about Peter Knox?

(England and Australia, September 1944)

(...)

On 17 november 1945 Peter Knox married **Monica Newcombe**, an English WREN⁽¹⁾ in Newman College Chapel, Melbourne University.



Marriage of Peter KNOX (RAAF) and Monica Newcombe (WREN), thereafter f.l.t.r.: Norm Jarvis, Peter Murphy and Pamela Knox (sister of Peter). Monica Newcombe with her colleagues of the WREN. The marriage took place at the Newman College Chapel, Melbourne University (Australia), on November, 17 1945. Monica was sent to Australia for active service with the Women's Royal Navy. © Peter Knox -1995-

They got nine children:

| Given name | Place and date of birth | Actual status |
|-------------|----------------------------|--|
| Caroline | *Melbourne, 1947, January | Lives in Canada |
| Jane | *Melbourne, 1948, November | USA, married Marjan Kiepora and manager of their own supply company for airplane parts |
| Christopher | *London, 1950, August | Died after some hours |
| Elizabeth | *Londen, 1952, January | Married, 4 children |
| Anne | *Madrid, 1953, July | |
| Edmund | *Madrid, 1955, May | Married Phil, 3 sons |
| Kate | *Lissabon, 1958, January | Lives at Queensland, Australia |
| Paul | *Lissabon, 1960, January | Lives in Londen |
| Louise | *Sevenoaks UK, 1962, June | |

¹ Female member of the Royal Navy. K.M.



The young couple Peter Knox – Monica Newcombe
with first-born Caroline (1947)

At the unveiling of the monument in Mol-Postel on sunday 03 september 2006 all the children and grandchildren of Peter Knox were present, except Caroline and Kate, who were unable to attend.



Royal Australian Air Force – Bombardiers on Penrhos Wales, anno 1943.
Peter Knox at 2nd row, extreme left.

Before they came to Belgium in June 2005, Jane and Marian organised a remembrance service at the Newark Air Museum in U.K.

You have seen already several pictures of Jane and Marjan in Belgium, June, 18 and 19, 2005.

Before flying to Belgium, they were already in England for a ceremony. Months before our first contact in 2004, Jane had arranged a remembrance service for the crew of Lancaster ME846 in the Newark Air Museum, together with the families of the other crew members. The unveiling of a “commemorative plaque” was the culminating point. After their days in England, they came to Belgium on 18 and 19 June 2005.



2005 – on Saturday **June, 11 2005** at the **Newark Air Museum** (Newark, Nottingham NG24 2NY – UK) the plaque or remembrance table was unveiled for the crew of Lancaster ME846, code PG-C from 619. squadron, stationed at the airfield of Dunholme Lodge (Lincolnshire, U.K.).



The plaque at the Newark Air Museum



Family and friends of the crew of Lancaster ME846
gathered on initiative of Jane Knox-Kiepora
(11.06.2005 – Newark Air Museum)



“The Newark Seven”



All participating people, Newark 2005



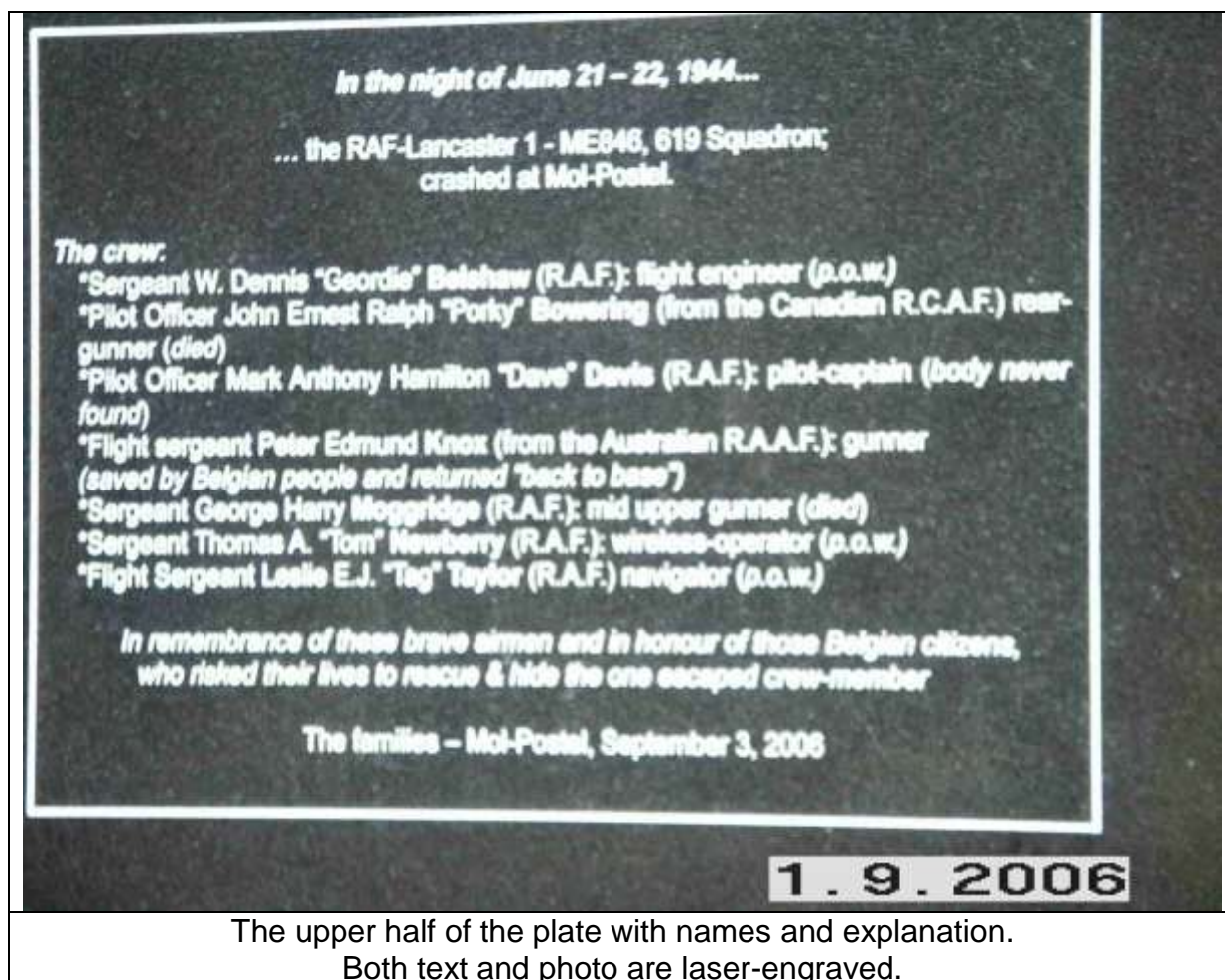
Jane Knox and Marjan Kiepora

The conclusion of their first visit to Balen, Geel, Mol-Postel and Leopoldsbuurg-Immert, was that the lord mayor of Mol, Paul Rotthier, promised to build a monument for the crew of Lancaster ME846 in the wood near the crash site.

The administrative and technical staff of the city made a very styled concept and constructed the monument in bricks, with only a sober black marble plate, with photo and names of the crew members.



The monument in the woods near the abbey of Postel, close to the crash site, unveiled on sunday September, 3 2006.



Everything was ready for the ceremony on September, 3 in Mol-Postel: the guests from abroad were gathered in a Brussels hotel, the brochure was printed, the speeches were written... and then, a complete surprise...

Chapter 9. In extremis the official story of the crash had to be rewritten

A few days before the unveiling of the monument in Mol-Postel on Sunday 3 september 2006, Kamiel Mertens discovered a new lead to the history of the crash. Mr Wim Govaerts from Lier, plane hunter at BAHA and author, and the professional military Christiaan Vanhee from Leopoldsburg (Camp of Beverlo), an amateur-investigator on the Second World War, had important news about the crash of Lancaster ME846.

In the official records of the R.A.F. has been noted that ME846 was shot down by German anti-aircraft artillery (FLAK or Flugabwehr Kanone).

Now, Christiaan Vanhee discovered in German archives the “Abschussmeldung” (Report of a shot down by a night fighter). The German pilot-officer Major **Eckart von Bonin** described in detail how he, with his navigator and radio-operator on his side, in his Messerschmitt Bf.110 liquidated British bombers that night of 21-22 June 1944. He was Gruppenkommandeur of II./NJG 1 Nachtjägergruppe (group commander of the 2. German night fighter squadron) at the airfield in Sint-Truiden (Belgian province of Limburg). His squadron was informed by German radarstations about an allied bomberfleet, coming over The Netherlands and the north of Belgium, direction Wesseling - Köln-Bonn (Germany).

The German nightfighters started from Sint-Truiden airfield and waited for the coming air-armada, at a position about 10-15 km S-E from Turnhout. Von Bonin choose his victim and from below the enemy he fired on the Lancaster ME846. The bullets hit the extreme right motor (nr 4) and the plane was in flames.

Von Bonin sees how the enemy-pilot tries to keep his Lancaster in the air, but after a short time, it exploded in the air. Von Bonins registration of the time and the place is so precise that we must conclude he shot the Lancaster ME846 out of the sky.



A Messerschmitt Bf110 – a double-engine fighter with three seats: pilot, mechanic and marconist - radioman.

Anschuß!

II./Nachtjagdgeschwader 1 Gefechtsstand, den 23. 6. 1944.

| | | |
|---|-------|---------|
| (Name, Dienstgrad, Truppenteil) | (Ort) | (Datum) |
| R. v. L. u. Ob. v. L. 29 Nr. 498/44 u. 6.9.44 Nr. 47. Abflugs Nr. II 7. Hb. | | |

fe.

336 **Abschussmeldung**

1. Zeit (Tag, Stunde, Minute) und Gegend: 22.6.1944 - 01.14 Uhr
LL - LM etwa 20 km südl. Eindhoven.

1a) Höhe: 5400 m
Durch wen ist der Abschuss erfolgt: Hptm. von Bonin - Obfw. Jörden - Obgefr. Zerbach
viarmotorig mit doppeltem Leitwerk

2. Flugzeugtyp des abgeschossenen Flugzeuges:

3. Staatsangehörigkeit des Gegners: England
Merksnummern: bzw. Kennzeichen:

4. Art der Vernichtung:

a) weisse Benzinflamme, dunkle Rauchflamme, 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. Jörden - Obgefr. Zerbach

b) Erde

9. Anzahl der Angriffe, die auf das feindliche Flugzeug gemacht wurden: 1


FRANZ HESS, Benzinweg, Münster, Berln. Lager-Nr. 1893

Summary and translation

Second squadron night fighters (stationed at base Sint-Truiden) – 23.06.1944 (date of the report) **Abschussmeldung:** on 22.06.1944 at 01.14 uur a.m. ±20 km S. of Eindhoven, altitude 5.400 m, by Hauptman von Bonin, Oberfeldwebel Johrden en Obergefreiter Zerbach; - target four-engine airplane. British origin – bright flames, parts of the plane are gone. It happened on our side of the border (in occupied Belgium). Large fire at the crashsite – Witnesses: Johrden and Zerbach – *to be continued*

10. Richtung, aus der die einzelnen Angriffe erfolgten : Angriffsposition
11. Entfernung, aus der der Abschuss erfolgte : 150 m
12. Taktische Position, aus der der Abschuss angesetzt wurde : Angriffsposition
13. Ist einer der feindlichen Bordschützen kampfunfähig gemacht worden? nicht beobachtet
14. Verwandte Munitionsart : MG - FF - Munition
15. Munitionsverbrauch : 24 Schuß MG - FF - Munition
16. Art und Anzahl der Waffen, die bei dem Abschuss gebraucht wurden : 2 MG - FF
17. Typ der eigenen Maschine Bf 110 - G-4 mit SN 2
18. Weiteres taktisch oder technisch Bemerkenswertes : --
19. Treffer in der eigenen Maschine : keine
20. Beteiligung weiterer Einheiten: Einsatz "ungeführte zahme Sau", durch 3. Jagddivision.

m.d.W.d.G.b.


Hauptmann.

(continued) Direction of the attack; "Angriffsposition" (from below the Lancaster)– on a distance of 150 m – Any enemy air men shot down? Not observed – Ammunition: "MG-FF-ammunition" (machine gun). My plane: Bf110 (Messerschmitt) – G4 mit SN2 (?) – No own damage – Other units involved? Use of "ungeführte zahme Sau" (?) by the 3rd division. (technique used from 1939 on: approach the enemy from behind and below, without being observed by the enemy; firing tilted up.
(signed: von Bonin.)

von Bonin, Hptm.
II./Nachtjagdgeschwader 1

O. U., den 23.6.1944.

Gefechtsbericht
zum Dunkelnachtjagdabschuß in "ungeführter zahmer Sau" der Besatzung
Hptm.von Bonin - Obfw.Johrden - Obgfr.Zerbach am 22.6.44 um 01.14 Uhr.

Am 22.6.44 startete ich um 00.42 Uhr zum Nachteinsatz in "ungeführter zahmer Sau". Nach Reportage in den Feindstrom gekommen, sah mein Bordfunker gegen 01.09 Uhr ein Feindflugzeug. Er wies mich ein und ich setzte mich in Angriffsposition. Ich schoß einen gutliegenden, langen Feuerstoss vom Rumpf bis zum rechten Innenmotor, worauf das Feindflugzeug sofort hell an den beschossenen Stellen brannte. Es ging in eine Linkskurve und stürzte hell brennend steil ab. An der Wolkenobergrenze (1000 m) montierte die rechte Fläche ab um zwei Hauptteile schlugen um 01.14 Uhr mit Aufschlagbrand auf. Wir erkannten den Aufschlagbrand an dem plötzlichen Aufhellen der dünnen Wolkendecke. Der Absturz und Aufschlag wurde von der gesamten Besatzung einwandfrei beobachtet. Der Bruch muss nach Koppelnavigation etwa 20 - 30 km südwestl. - südostw. von Eindhoven liegen. Abschusshöhe 5400 m.

Johrden, Obfw.
I./Nachtjagdgeschwader 1

O. U., den 23.6.1944.

Luftzeugenkampfbericht
zum Dunkelnachtjagdabschuß in "ungeführter zahmer Sau" der Besatzung
Hptm.von Bonin - Obfw.Johrden - Obgfr.Zerbach am 22.6.44 um 01.14 Uhr.

Am 22.6.44 startete ich mit Hptm. von Bonin als Flugzeugführer um 00.42 Uhr mit der Bf 110 G9+BC zum Nachteinsatz. Durch Gruppentastreportage kamen wir westlich Eindhoven in den Feindstrom, der in etwa 5000 m mit Kurs 110 Grad flog. Gegen 01.09 Uhr sah ich ein viermotoriges Feindflugzeug in 5400 m. Hptm. von Bonin sah das Feindflugzeug nach meiner Einweisung und schoß in Angriffsposition um 01.12 Uhr einen langen gutliegenden Feuerstoss zwischen Rumpf und rechten Innenmotor. Das viermotorige Feindflugzeug brannte sofort mit heller Flamme. Das Feuer griff auf den Rumpf über. Das Feindflugzeug machte hell brennend eine Linkskurve und stürzte dann senkrecht ab. In 1000 m (Wolkenobergrenze) erfolgte eine Explosion und es fielen zwei brennende Hauptteile zur Erde. Der Aufschlag erfolgte um 01.14 Uhr. Der Bruch muss etwa 20 - 30 km südwestl. bis südostw. Eindhoven liegen.

Zerbach, Obgfr.
II./Nachtjagdgeschwader 1

O. U., den 23. 6. 1944.

Luftzeugenkampfbericht
zum Dunkelnachtjagdabschuß in "ungeführter zahmer Sau" der Besatzung
Hptm.von Bonin - Obfw.Johrden - Obgfr.Zerbach am 22.6.44 um 01.14 Uhr.

Am 22.6.44 um 00.42 Uhr startete ich als Bordschütze mit Hptm.von Bonin als Flugzeugführer zum Nachtjagdeinsatz "ungeführte zahme Sau". Gegen 01.09 Uhr sahen wir ein viermotoriges Feindflugzeug. Hptm. von Bonin setzte sich in Angriffsposition und schoss etwa gegen 01.12 Uhr einen langen Feuerstoss in die rechte Fläche zwischen Rumpf und Motor, welche sofort hell brannte. Hell brennend stürzte der Bomber in einer grossen Linkskurve ab. An der Wolkenobergrenze (1000 m) explodierte das Feindflugzeug. Es brach die rechte Fläche ab. Den Aufschlagbrand konnte ich um 01.14 Uhr beobachten.

Participants / witnesses:

Fight report about shooting an enemy in a dark night, with crew on 22.06.1944 at 01.14 a.m. "On 22.06.1944 I started at 00.42 h. for a night mission in "ungeführter zahme Sau" (individual hunt based on own insights). According to the report, arrived

in a wave of hostile planes, my wireless operator saw at 01.09 h. a.m. an enemy plane. He showed me the route, and I placed myself in attack position. I fired a long salvo from the fuselage to the right engine. The plane burned immediately at the points that were hit. It went in a left curve and crashed steeply down, heavily burning. When reaching the clouds (at 1.000 m) the right wing broke down and two large parts of the plane crashed at 1.14 h. a.m., still heavily burning. We recognized the flash by the sudden lightning of the clouds. The crash of the plane was observed clearly by our entire crew. The crash site, based on navigation details, is situated approx.. 20-30 km south-west to south-east of Eindhoven (*Postel is approx. 25 km south-west of Eindhoven. K.M.*) We shot the plane on a height of 5.400 m.”

The report of von Bonin is confirmed by the two other crew members. Johrden confirms a heavy explosion at 1.000 m. after which the plane crashed in two large parts. This explosion is also confirmed by Zerbach.



Oblt Eckart-Wilhelm von Bonin &
Fw Johrden



Hptm von Bonin
& Ofw Johrden



von Bonin 1941

So, ultimately we had to print an “Errata et Addenda” to the Lancaster brochure. The two specialists who found this information – Vanhee and Govaerts – were also invited at the unveiling.

Chapter 10. Unveiling of the Lancastermonument at Mol-Postel (3 sept. 2006)

A few days before the unveiling, Jane en Marjan Knox-Kiepura invited all relatives of the crew members at the Radisson SAS Royal Hotel in the center of Brussels.

PROGRAM-ME 846 REUNION SEPTEMBER 1, 2006 to SEPTEMBER 3, 2006

Radisson SAS Royal Hotel
Rue du Fosse-aux-Loups 47
B-1000 Brussels
Belgium
Tel: 32-2-219-2828
Fax: 32-2-219-6262
Co-coordinator for ME846 Group: Sarah.Rijpkema@RadissonSAS.com

Friday, September 1 2006
7 p.m. Reception –Cocktails/Buffer Dinner in the Copenhagen Room (or as announced)
Hosted by Marjan and Jane Kiepura – we look forward to greeting you all

The reception will include musical interlude (to be announced) but includes: Marjan Kiepura – Piano –Chopin
Alex Knox – accompanied by Eleanor Moffatt – A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square
Jerome Knox – “ “ The White Cliffs of Dover
Chorus – Lilli Marlene and We'll Meet Again
Saturday, September 2 2006

6 p.m. Reception - Cocktails/Buffer Dinner in the Copenhagen Room
Hosted by Marjan and Jane Kiepura
More song and piano
Sunday, September 3 2006

9 a.m. Minibuses to take us to Postel/Mol

11 a.m. Unveiling of Plaque, speech by Lord Mayor, this will be attended by WWII veterans, Belgian Resistance and notables. There will be local Musical Band.

After ceremony Marjan and Jane Kiepura will host luncheon at:
Restaurant “De Postelche Hofstee - Reuselseweg, B-2400 Mol Postel near the Dutch border

Mini-buses available to take guests back to Brussels according to their train/plane schedules.

Contact Addresses:
Jane Knox-Kiepura – jane@janeknox.com mobile: UK 0777-266-5609 or 0790-304-1951
Marjan Kiepura – Kiepura@kiepura.com 0781-796-1011

We will be arriving in London August 23 and can be contacted:
Jury's Clifton Ford Hotel
47 Welbeck Street,
London W1 -tel 486-6600

They had a program for Friday and Saturday in Brussels, and on Sunday morning, an autocar was available to bring everybody to Mol-Postel. On behalf of the Australian embassy in Brussels Mrs Carol Nicoll, "Minister-Counsellor Education, Science and Research" was present.

The technical service of the town administration of Mol had prepared the site: chairs, speakers corner, flags, public address-system, etc. Representatives of the local veteran associations and the press were present. A crew from the local tv-station Kempen made interviews and filmed the ceremony. Kamiel Mertens opened and introduced the different speakers: the lord mayor of Mol, Mr Paul Rotthier, the president of the 619. Squadron Veterans, Mrs Jane Knox-Kiepura...

A blessing, spoken by Rev. Norman Taylor, son of navigator flight/sgt Leslie Taylor, accompanied the unveiling, which was jointly done by Mr Rotthier and Mrs Jane Knox. The band of the local fire brigade played the national anthems of U.K. and Belgium and the Last Post.

Mrs and Mr Jane Knox-Kiepura offered a dinner to all the Belgian and foreign invited, in the Postelse Hofstee, a first class restaurant at the Belgian-Holland border.



Final arrangements before the start of the ceremony. The umbrellas and wet chairs are significant: heavy wind and rain were unfortunately present as well.



Lord mayor Paul Rotthier (with Belgian tricolore on his belly) confers with Kamiel Mertens about the programme.



The standards of all patriotic associations of Mol are here as guard of honor.





Left: Mertens introduces the speakers - Right: A platoon of the Mol' fire brigade plays "The Last Post" in honor of the fallen allied militaries



Left: Members of the "military old timer club" bring colour at that rainy day. Right The widow Knox (mother of Jane) and Mia, the wife of Reginald Brookes (Peter and Reginald spent several weeks together at the Hoge Hof in Geel-Liessel).



The Lancaster monument with flowers from the families



Left: At the Postelse Hofstee - Jane and Marjan Kiepura-Knox invited all the families from the crew and the personalities. Right: Beautiful tables and excellent menus

The unveiling of Sunday 3 September 2006 was highlighted in the local and national Press. Several specialised magazines had an article about Lancaster ME846 and the monument.

22 KEMPEN

Nieuwsblad 04092006

■ MOL Nabestaanden bemanning komen uit VS om plaat te onthullen

Monument herdenkt crash bommenwerper

Het logboek van de Britse Lancaster 1-ME846 eindigt in de nacht van 21 op 22 juni 1944. De bommenwerper werd die nacht neergehaald door Duits afweergeschut. Drie van de zeven bemanningsleden stierven. De gemeente Mol en de nabestaanden onthullen zondag op het kruispunt van het Miel Ottenpad en de Oude Bladelseweg een gedenksteen voor de bemanning.

Saskia VAN GESTEL

In de nacht van 21 op 22 juni 1944 stierg de RAF-bommenwerper Lancaster 1-ME846 op vanuit Engeland. De geallieerden voerden die dagen ook in de lucht een verhitte strijd tegen Nazi-Duitsland. De bombardementen volgden elkaar in ijtempo op. De zevenkoppige bemanning van de Lancaster had als bestemming Wesseling bij Keulen, waar ze fabrieken en installaties van synthetische brandstof moesten bombarderen.

Ze zijn er nooit geraakt, want rond 1.20 uur werd de bommenwerper neergehaald door Duits afweergeschut. Het toestel crashte in Mol-Postel, vlakbij de Nederlandse grens. Vier van de zeven bemanningsleden konden zich met een valscherp redden.

Bedankbriefje

De Australiër Peter Knox was de enige overlevende, die niet in de handen van de Duitsers viel. Na enkele nachten wondelen, belandde de man in Balen. Daar werd hij geholpen door de familie Vermierdt. Dankzij de plaatselijke verzetsmensen werd hij vervolgens ondergebracht op verschillende schuiladressen in Balen, Geel en Turnhout. Eind september werd Peter Knox naar Brussel overgebracht, waar hij zich bij de bevrijding op 4 september 1944 weer bij zijn strijdmakkers kon voegen.



De gedenkplaat voor de bemanning van de bommenwerper werd onder ruime belangstelling onthuld.

De bemanning van de neergestarte Lancaster: Peter Edmund Knox, Thomas A. Newberry, W. Dennis Belshaw, Mark Anthony Hamilton Davis, Leslie E.J. Tayler, George Harry Moggridge, John Ernest Ralph Bowering.

© BEPRO & FOTO LOUIS VERHAEGEN

Toen de Tweede Wereldoorlog afgelopen was, kreeg de familie Vermierdt uit Balen nog een bedankbriefje van Peter Knox. Dit werd in september 2004 teruggevonden. De vinder, Alfons Vermierdt, vroeg vervolgens aan de Balense vzw Studium General

om piloot Peter Knox op te sporen. Peter Knox was al overleden, maar zijn dochter Jane Knox was bereid de herinnering aan haar vader en de andere bemanningsleden levendig te houden.

Daarom heeft de gemeente Mol ervoor gezorgd dat zondag

op het kruispunt van het fietspad Miel Ottenpad en de Oude Bladelseweg een gedenkplaat kon worden onthuld. Dit gebeurde in het bijzijn van een groot aantal familieleden van de bemanning, waaronder Jane Knox uit Amerika.

Het Nieuwsblad (Flemish, Belgium) Monday 04 september 2006



Jane Knox-Kiepura, daughter of fallen crewmember F/Sgt Peter Knox, beside the freshly unveiled memorial at Mol-Postel. HOWARD HEELEY

Fourteen months after a plaque dedicated to the crew of Avro Lancaster I ME846 was unveiled at the Newark Air Museum, Notts, a second memorial has been erected in Mol Postel, Belgium. Many members of the crew's family, along with friends and local people, attended the ceremony on September 3.

The memorial incorporates a 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 where ME846 is believed to have crashed on June 22, 1944.

The monument has been constructed thanks to the generosity of the town's Lord Mayor, Burgemeester Paul Rotthier, who commissioned its production by 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 F/Sgt Peter Edmund Knox.

HOWARD HEELEY

The montly "FlyPast", january 2007 with the story of Jane Knox

ME846 MEMORIAL DEDICATION CEREMONY September 1st-3rd, 2006

By Howard Heeley

Fourteen months after the first gathering at the museum for the Plaque unveiling in memory of the crew of crashed 619 Squadron, Lancaster 1 ME846, the 'ME846 Family' gathered together again in Belgium in early September. This growing family have 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.

Everyone initially gathered 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, FS [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 shared and new bonds forged before everyone prepared themselves to travel to Mol for the unveiling ceremony at 11am September 3, 2006.



Howard Heeley had an extensive report in "The Dispersal", from his "Newark Air Museum", november 2006 (continued the next month)

Piecing the past

Howard Heeley reports on a recent memorial dedication ceremony at Mol-Postel, Belgium

Fourteen months after forty-six friends and relatives first gathered at Newark Air Museum to witness a plaque unveiling in memory of the crew of crashed 619 Squadron Lancaster I ME846, the 'ME846 family' gathered together again in Belgium over the weekend of 1 - 3 September 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 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, which was 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 11:00 on Sunday 3 September 2006.

Also in "Aircene UK" (2006), thanks to Howard Heeley

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Wednesday 27th September 2006

www.bdpst.co.uk

THE POST

Families' bid to trace Lancaster bomber crewman shot down



Thomas (Tom) Newberry is second from the left in this crew picture

Search for a war veteran

FAMILIES of war veterans are hoping to trace a Dagenham RAF man shot down during the Second World War.

Sergeant Thomas Newberry was one of seven crew members on board a Lancaster Bomber when it crashed in Belgium in June 1944.

Three of the men were killed but Sgt Newberry, a wireless

By Mark Taylor

mark.taylor2@archant.co.uk

operator, survived and was captured by the Germans.

Jane Knox-Kiepusa, daughter of crash survivor Peter Knox, has painstakingly tracked down the relatives of all the men and recently unveiled a memorial plaque in Belgium.

The only family she has been

unable to trace is that of Sgt Newberry. Until recently all that was known about him was that he was taken to Stalag Luft III, the German prisoner of war camp made famous in the film *The Great Escape*.

But a recently discovered diary of one of the other crew members has just revealed that in 1944 he lived at 16 Freshwater Road, Chadwell Heath.

None of the current residents of Freshwater Road remember him and it is not known whether Sgt Newberry is still alive.

All the crew of Lancaster Bomber ME846 trained at RAF Winton in Lincolnshire.

If you remember Thomas "Tom" Newberry, whose name could be spelled Newbery, contact the POST newsdesk on (020) 8709 0018.

"Barking & Dagenham Post" (wednesday 27.09.2006)

THE POST
www.bdpst.co.uk
Wednesday 1st November 2006 39

All Our Yesterdays



The doomed plane (now pictured during training in early March 1944 in front of a Short building at RAF Witterby). Left to right: Flight Sergeant Peter Edmund Knox (bomb aimer), Sergeant Thomas Newberry (wireless operator), Sergeant Dennis 'Gander' Belslow (flight engineer), Pilot Officer Mark Anthony Hamilton (crew chief), Flight Sergeant Leslie 'Big' Taylor (navigator), Sergeant George Harry Muggidge (mid-upper gunner) and Pilot Officer John Ernest Ralph 'Perky' Bowring (rear gunner).

Doomed plane hero stayed with crew pal

THOUSANDS of young men have left Barking and Dagenham over the years to fight for their country in foreign lands. Between them they have carried out many acts of heroism and continue to do so in Iraq and Afghanistan today. But few can surpass the courageous actions of an unsung war hero who later died in a Belgian cemetery. Sergeant George Harry Muggidge was born the son of a docker in Mile End on December 20 1924. After the construction of the Becontree Estate the Muggidge family, like many east-enders, moved out of town and settled in Dagenham. George moved into 80 Lifechurch Road with his parents, George and Clara, and older sisters Mabel and Violet. When war broke out George was only 14 but as soon as he was old enough he signed up for the RAF. He joined a Lancaster Bomber crew and was soon flying missions to Europe from RAF Duxford, Cambridgeshire. On June 21 1944 they were returning from a raid on an oil depot in Cologne when they were hit by cannon fire from a

German Messerschmitt. Realising their plane was doomed the crew baled out. For decades the details of exactly what happened in those few moments were unclear. But recently a personal diary written by crewmember Dennis Belslow came to light. It revealed that George had an opportunity to escape but chose to go back into the stricken plane to help rear gunner Ralph 'Perky' Bowring. Tragically his heroism was in vain and neither man made it out alive. Their bodies were later recovered and buried in an Antwerp cemetery. A moving passage from the memoirs of Peter Knox, who escaped, reads: "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." Pilot Mark Davis bravely stayed at the controls and kept the plane up for as long as possible before also losing his life in the crash. Four of the crew parachuted to safety. Three were captured by the Germans and Flight Sergeant Knox managed to escape back to England thanks to the help of Belgian people. One of the survivors, Sergeant Thomas Newberry, was also from Dagenham. An entry in Dennis Belslow's diary revealed he was living at 18 Freshwater Road, Chesham Heath in the 1940s. He was taken to a prisoner of war camp but nothing is known of his movements after the war. In his memoirs Sergeant Knox writes: "I met the parents of the two east-enders; the mid-upper gunner, George Muggidge, and the wireless operator, Thomas Newberry, in a pub in Barking. They had become friends in their downtime when our plane went missing. Newberry's parents knew he was safe as a prisoner. They treated me to lots of beer. The Muggidges too were very kind. I could not offer much comfort but I praised their son's calmness and courage. I could recall his voice saying that he was preparing to jump. As I left Mrs Muggidge pressed a tea-splashing note in my hand and said: "Thanks for coming Ducks."



Mark Taylor recalls a story of true bravery

This year a memorial was unveiled near the crash site in Belgium. It stands as a tribute to the bravery of the crew members of Lancaster Bomber ME846, and to the Belgian people who risked their lives to help the survivors. Howard Healey, of Nottingham, who has researched the crash and helped to trace relatives, said: "The people of Barking and Dagenham should be very proud of their native son George Harry Muggidge, who gave his life while trying to save his fellow crew member, in June 1944."

The POST would like to thank Howard Healey for his help in producing this article. Do you remember Thomas Newberry or George Muggidge? Call reporter Mark Taylor on (020) 8709 0018.




Sergeants Muggidge and Bowring at the unveiling of a memorial at crash site

Barking & Dagenham Post, 01.11.2006 by Mark Taylor.



619 SQUADRON

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SQUADRON NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2007

Secretary's Notes

At the beginning of a New Year, I send my personal greetings to all members and their families for a happy, peaceful and healthy 2007.

OPERATION WESSERLING - 21/22 JUNE 1944

21/22 June 1944 was a very busy night over the skies of Belgium when 619 Squadron's Lancaster - ME 846 was intercepted by a German night fighter and set on fire. The Pilot ordered the crew to abandon the aircraft; the Bomb Aimer, Navigator, Engineer and Wireless Operator baled out but, sadly, the Pilot and Gunners were killed when the Lancaster exploded as it plummeted into a wooded area between Mol and Postel about 40 miles north east of Brussels. The Gunners were buried in the British War Graves Cemetery in Antwerp but the body of the Pilot has never been found.

The crew left RAF Dunholme Lodge, a bomber airfield 5 miles north east of Lincoln, at 23.01 hours on operation Wesserling, an oil depot on the Rhine 8 miles south of Cologne and caught fire at 01.20 hours on 22 June 1944.

I should now like to tell you about the remarkable story of Flight Sergeant Peter Knox, Bomb Aimer and a member of the RAAF, who evaded capture by the Germans. The other three crew members became POWs.

After landing and hiding his parachute, Peter had to find a hiding place, as people were up and about when he came across a hedge in full leaf, covering a small hollow. He felt reasonably secure for the day and snatched some sleep.

About the middle of that day, Peter heard a dog barking and, within a few minutes, it had unearthed him. Its

owner, a young boy, quickly disappeared and returned with a man. He was clearly not a German and Peter realised that the moment had arrived to identify himself and said in French "Avateur Anglais." The man, boy and dog quickly disappeared and all he could do was wait and hope that the man was Dutch or Belgian. He did not know on which side of the border he had landed. He learned later that the dog belonged to a Belgian boy, aged 15, and the man was his father.

It was now close to evening when Peter heard voices and two men approached him. In his school boy French, he explained who he was which was a tense moment for all three. If Peter was a German posing as an English airman, trying to infiltrate the underground movement, the two men stood to lose their lives. They said that they were friends and told him to follow them to a barn with a hay loft which he was instructed to climb.

Before long another man came with some food. He spoke some English and the interrogation began. They were both nervous as in the event of being captured, aircrew were instructed to tell the German interrogator only "name rank and number." On the other hand, if he was lucky enough to be picked up by the Belgian Resistance Movement, they would have to establish Peter's credentials and ask him very direct questions to verify that he was a genuine RAF aircrew. Finally, Peter accepted that he was in the hands of the underground movement and answered all their questions.

Peter was moved from the farm and taken to the middle of a small pine forest and held in isolation. His minder was a youngish man who spoke some English.

For the next two months, Peter was moved to various locations in northern Belgium until 4 September 1944 when it was clear that the Germans had withdrawn and Brussels was about to be liberated. By the next day,

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Historia pewnej tablicy

Ostrea tringa

Była to ich wspólna firma sklep. Mielni na terenie poproszawickim stał na składy pań w Westerling, niedaleko Kolonii. W najkrótszym czasie roku, z 21 na 22 czerwca 1944, wystartowali z bazy RAF Wimboppe, gdzie obecnie mieści się Newpark Air Museum. Na pokładzie Lancastera ME846 mieli dwie ilości pań w Westerling, w tym znaczny ładunek amunicji. "Kod bostera"

Zadany zadaniem milosierdzia miał wykonać swoje zadanie z wysokości 230 tys. stóp. Ciężko załadowany bombowcem poszedł zaczął wzniósł się w górę. Pilot Mark Anthony Hamilton Davis, znany także jako „Dave”, miał ciężki by wzniósł się na wysokość, a którą planowano bombardowanie. Po przebiegu lat kanonem La Manche dwa z czterech stróży zaczęły się przemieszczać. Mechanik pokładowy przegubił, by utrzymać poziom pędzi czas by samą wysokość. Nie wstąpił się zatem przez krótkie 15 minut.

Kiedy strzaki ochłodziły się, zaczęto zbliżać powoli samolot. Na wysokości 18 tys. stop, po przebiegu nad Inlesterem, wystrzelił Włochów, Jameson: Peter Edmund Knox zarządził bliski strzał oddeparczy z ziemi. Pilot zaczął tak naniewroć: samolotem, by strzelić znowu.

Cieśno 20 km na południe od Eintrawen dostało w pobliżu ich cmentarza do kilku eksplozji. Władze o godzinie 1.20 rano słyszeć zaczęły wystrzały – został trafiony, prawdopodobnie z samolotu, znajdującego się nad Meisselschmitta 118. Szereżyła się w płomieniach. Próbowali opisać okolicę, ten jednak okazał się zbyt długi. Ich zaskakujące było to, że w pobliżu samolotu zgromadzenie było małym. Pierwszymi okazały się.

Wzlecia z pływającego samolotu
zabójcy pierwszy miał strzelać, za-
padachrumem języki nagiżej
motowego wyjścia bombardier,
wstępnie mechanik pokładowy.

Obok polskiej tablicy w Newark Air Museum, upamiętniającej mężczyzn i kobiety Polskiej Siły Powietrznych służących w RAF Faldingworth w latach 1944-1947, mieści się tablica poświęcona załodze Lancastera 1-ME845 z Dywizjonu 619. Odsiewa 21 czerwca 2005 roku, okazała się nie tyle chwalebny, lecz żenadź, w historii wojennej załogi, co początkiem dalszych poszukiwań, które przyniosły niespodziewane wyniki.

nawigator, radiooperator i na-
końcu pilot. Dwóch strażców
miało ewakuować się wyjściem
tyłowym.

Kazdy przed skłosem miał potwierdzić opuszczenie pola na przez interier. Peter Knut powiedział jako pierwszy. Słyszał ledwiego koczownika kolegę, w tym swego przyjaciela — strażka grobielowego, George'a Moggridge'a. Nie było jedynie potwierdzenia ze strony strażnika tylnego.

Kolektry zaczęli króćco wy-
dzikować, podnosząc gły pilót us-
tawiał do końca utrzymać sta-
bły lot. Zapewna miał już wiedzę
zwykłą. W obliczu niebezpiecz-
stwa, co murował, zrobu-
wał, co murował, by jego
kolektry zrobuł gły z życiem
Ci, który ocalał, podniósł
podniósł jak według znaczenia
nadał w jak szczególny uocze-
nie to, że kładzie Dostaw miał

Zaloga w RAF Wrexham, marzec 1944: Flight Sergeant, Peter Edmund Knox - A416403 RAAF - bombardier; Sergeant, Thomas A. Newberry - 1820063 RAF - radiooperator; Sergeant, W. Dennis, George Bolshaw - 1802896 RAF - mechanik podwoziowy; Pilot Officer, Mack Anthony Hamilton 'Dave' Davis - 174023 RAF - pilot; Flight Sergeant, Leslie E. J. 'Jay' Taylor - 1585052 RAF - nawigator; Sergeant, George Harry Macgregor - 1596779 RAFVR - strzelec; ground crew: Pilot Officer, John Ernest Ralph 'Pony' Rowland - 276189 RCAF - strzelec tyfii.

zanim do Deurne, a po wygnie-
szeniu na cmentarzu
Schoonselhof w Antwerpii. Ni-
gdy jednak nie zlozono ciała
płota. Nie jest też dokładnie
znane miejsce, gdzie spadł
silnik samolotu.

Przywołanie z pamięci

64. wieku polskiej Jarek Kuczyński – ciekawiebohaterka Piotra Kozaka RAFA – z domu Marjana, syna słynnej pary śpiewaków – Marty Eggert i Jana Kiepiury. Zaczęła bliżej interesować się tajemniczymi przyczynami swojego ojca. Gdy tylko porzuciła na zdrowie, pomogła mu odzwyczeć na piśmie historię sprzed 50 lat. Wspólnie ze swoim matką przysposiła mu literaturę dotyczącą tamtego czasu, która pomogła jej odczytać jego wspomnienia.

umych – czy udało im się wysłuchać. Wykrzyknieniem głośno imię „George” (Maggridge), mój głos jednak niemal gnił w ciemnej szklance i uświadamiałem sobie, że nie było możliwości nawiązania jakiegokolwiek kontaktu.

Kłosa wyślizgnął bezpiecznie w środku lasu. Zgodnie z wytyczną przez skłapi natychmiast wyciągnął niezbędne rzeczy: jak kompas, nóż, pojemnik i tabletki do odciążenia wody. Ułożył w jaskini dozwolony swój sprzęt: kamień umieszczony, i natychmiast go gwałtownie. Według instrukcji, pozostawił na zachód.

Przeglądając te dwa zdjęcia, nie nadzieli, gdzie postawiony w ukryciu potężny wschodniy działo. Gdy młody zapał w czasie, wymusił w dalsze wdrówko. O znowu znalazł się przy samiej drodze, wzdłuż której ciągnęły się pola. Młody w kilkanaście minut. Jeden znowu nawet, by przynajmniej nie zapomnieli, że Peter opuścił wzrok i ponownie w dalsze. Znalazł stajnię z dwoma młodymi, w których postawiony w ukryciu. Nawet nie wiedział, czy znajduje się na terenie Belcy czy Holandi.

Ochwatni Belgierów

Nagle w łodzi drżał dotkliwie, młodego szczeniaka psa, który właśnie odrył go wraz ze swym właścicielem (Alfonse Vermeire), wyglądającym na chłopaka ze wsi. Póter powiedział po francusku, że jest z



Jules Biercks & Peter Kato

wie długo strzymał samolot w powietrzu.

Co wydarzyło się później, nie jest jasne. Wiadomo, że po bombardowaniu pokład opuścił mechanik pokładowy (nawigator i radiooperator). Pilotom nie udało się uciec, nie wiadomo też co umożliwiło ucieczkę strażnikom. Być może ich wyłączenie ewakuacyjne było już w planach.

Wentrug krowki RAF-u, bombowców eksplodował w powietrzu i nie spadłwały się po nim żadne szczątki. Trzech obywateli – Peter Kryn, Leslie Taylor i Dennis Belslaw (zwanym był Thomas Newberry) pamiętali, że widzieli wybuch samolotu pod nimi, gdy tamtę jancze byli w powietrzu – ale nie dostrzegali.

Jak wspominał książkę z niepamięci Postel w Belgii, „Zabawiany botanowiec eksperymentował w powietrzu (...). Wybuch był tak silny, że wystrzelił wszystkie skrzynki w okolicznych domach. Znalezione dwie martwych koralików, inni ocalał zdrowo: w strachu chłami”.

Ciała dwóch strzelców George'a Maggridge'a i Johna Browninga straconego są



Zweite Erwähnung: Verstrachen bei Laß: 2. mal: – Francis Westman

„Pamiętam, jak dyszkwalowałem Boga, że udało mi się uciec i straszenie wtedy chciałem, by jak nieszyfrowanej moja matka i ojciec dowiedzieli się, że żyję – wspominał Peter Kacyn pierwszy dzień po śladu z polska Luocastera. – Wierciec abstrakcyjnym wybuch – nasz samodzielną wódki na niebie. Pierwszym

genken istnielem i złożył
nam z pierni głębi szybko
pobiegł. Wciążem przytłacz
dwóch mężczyzn. Wytrzyma
czył im po trzasku kim jest
Powiedział, żeby pozost
nimi utrzymując długi dystans
Dotarli do jakiegoś gospodar
stwa. Nakazano Petrowo
uknąć się w stożku. Przem



Franz
Siercke
i Maria
Dietrich
Siercke-
Hayn



Even a Polish newspaper in London reported on it: "Dziennik Polski – Polish Daily", on 26.02.2007. Here again only the first of two pages.

Not only the international press paid attention to the Lancaster ME846, also the guests of Jane and Marjan sent their gratitude to them. One of the nephews of Jane wrote this text:

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

From the young Edmund Knox, nephew of Jane, with gratitude and respect.

Chapter 11. Missing in action: pilot captain Davis



Paul Stevenson

“Earlier we noted that after the crash no trace was found of pilot captain Davis.

Specialists opinion is that he stayed at the steering column so the other crew members could bail out, and the pilot was still in the plain when it exploded. The extreme high temperature from all kerosine burning, and the exploding bomb load, made his body pulverised.

Nevertheless, some people hoped to find at least some trace of him. Especially his nephew, Paul Stevenson, had good hope... he attended also the conference at the abbey on 5 april 2011 about further exploration of the crash site. Only after detailed explanation by the specialists of BAHA planehunters he accepted the inevitable.

(Paul Stevenson died 1. December 2013.)

Fons Vermierdt, “the boy with the dog”, died on 27 august 2009. He did not experience the discovery of the real crash site...

In je hart leven mensen
die daar helemaal thuis zijn
en die daar blijven wonen
zelfs als ze dood zijn.

Bedroefd melden wij u het heengaan van:

DIE HEER

Fons VERMIERDT

Echtgenoot van mevrouw Zeva AERTS

Gepensioneerd leeuw
lid van de Gepensioneerden

Geboren te Balen op 1 november 1930, en zacht ingeslapen
in het U.Z. Gasthuisberg te Leuven op 27 augustus 2009.

U wordt vriendelijk uitgenodigd tot een laatste groet gevolgd
door asverstrooiing op de begraafplaats te Balen - Centrum op
woensdag 2 september 2009 om 14.00 uur.

Samenkomst aan de begraafplaats om 13.45 uur.

De voorafgaande crematie geschiedt in alle intimiteit.

Groetgelegenheid in het Funerarium Dries, samen met de familie,
op **dinsdag 1 september 2009 van 18.30 uur tot 19.00 uur.**

Rouwadres: Mevr. Vermierdt - Aerts, Rijberg 24, 2490 Balen.

Balen, 27 augustus 2009.

De familie meldt u:

zijn echtgenote
Zeva AERTS

zijn zoon en schoondochter
Frankie en Lea VERMIERDT - BERGHMANS

zijn kleinkinderen
Dennis en Leen
Andy en Nathalie

Zijn verdere familie

De families VERMIERDT, AERTS, KEMPS en NIJTS

Met dank aan de hulpbetrekking
het personeel van het U.Z. Gasthuisberg te Leuven,
Markien, Cindy en Mandy van de Zelfstandige Thuisverzorging
en al diegenen die Fons gesteund waren.

Begr.: fun.cruik., nu Dries, woerd 34, 3490 Balen - tel 0145/61 33 48

The “boy with the dog” - Alfons Vermierdt - died on 27.08.2009

Chapter 12. Search for the crash site - 'lucky shot' by Koen Peeters

The amateur "archeologist-planehunter" **Koen Peeters** continues his search for remainders. On **20.10.2010** he reports the finding of bullets, bomb fragments and a piece of a parachute.

And in February 2011, he - together with his son Diederik and friend Steven Geukens - finally reports in the daily newspaper *Het Nieuwsblad* (15 februari 2011) that they found a huge crater, approximately 800 meters North of the monument, in the direction of the nearby highway (and the border Belgium - The Netherlands). This finding is of crucial importance for the Lancaster ME846-"family". In and around the crater, a large amount of bomb fragments, pieces of the plane and bullets were found. Several of these remnants can be linked with the crash of a plane similar to the Lancaster ME846.

Experts explain that there was first the crash, followed by a heavy explosion that spread the fragments over a large area. Newspapers like *De Standaard*, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, *De Streekkrant* en *Passe Partout* report on the story, announcing: "Vermiste bommenwerper teruggevonden". (Missing bomber found back).



Circular crater in the wood behind the monument, discovered by Koen Peeters. The diameter at ground level is 15 meter, with a depth of 3 meter! Originally, the crater was much deeper, but during the years the crater was filled with sediments like sand. The remnants of the cockpit were found almost in the middle of the crater (measurements by Thijs Hellings, maart 2014)

De plek waar de Lancaster crashte



Koen Peeters his son
Diederik and friend Steven
Geukens near the crater
(Passe Partout, 17.03.2011)

The discovery of the crater resulted in a conference on Tuesday, April 5, 2011 in the Abbey of Postel.



2011 – Mol-Postel 05 april – Conference at the abbey – Father Ivo Billiaert (archivist and host of this conference) invited Kamiel Mertens, Cynrick De Decker, Wim Govaerts, Paul Stevenson (†), Koen Peeters to the conference and a visit at the monument Objectives of the meeting: strategy for further action: is a professional search in the woods relevant, and if so, who pays the costs for such search?



2011 – Mol-Postel 05 april – Conference in the Abbey. This wreath from our friends of the UK, was placed at the monument after the conference.



Several fragments of the Lancaster ME846, dug up by Koen Peeters after discovery with metal detectors.



On Sunday, October, 2, there was high activity by the Belgian planehunters, the people of BAHA (**B**elgian **A**viation **H**istory **A**ssociation)

Conclusions by these BAHA-Planehunters

Some of the parts that were found, were identified as typically originating from a Lancaster, e.g. the **weight rudder balance arm**, and a fragment from the **FN mid upper turret**. A remainder of a parachute proves that at least one crew member remained in the plane. Also some parts of the bombs showed that the plane crashed with its bomb load. This coincides with all available information about the crash of the ME846. Also the information on the ammunition (the years 1942-1944) indicated that the metal parts could belong to the ME846.



Pictures made by the plane hunters, showing the results of their intensive search.



A few of dozens of fragments, discovered in and around the crater.

Second and final search with metal detectors by members of BAHA-Planehunters on Thursday **9 may 2013**. Present were: Wim Govaerts, Benny Ceulaers, Thijs Hellings and Luc Cox. One of the detectors is able to search at a depth of 8 m.

Report by Wim Govaerts to Howard Heeley, Newark Air Museum, U.K.
Lier, 10.05.2013

Dear Howard,

Yesterday we did a new thorough research at the crash site of ME846. We = Benny, Thijs, Luc, and myself. Kamiel also accompanied us during the day.

Thijs made a complete search of the area with his depth detector – which goes up to 8 meters – and proved negative for any major part.

Furthermore we expanded our search with several detectors starting from the pit in which the bombs exploded – deeper then 20 cm there is nothing to be found!

And what we found were only small fragments really scattered over a large area – Benny found a piece of aluminum of the bomb aimers dome in the opposite field, a piece of the engine was found on the road.

Thijs also found the quick release of a parachute harness inside the pit – but only that item – nothing further related.

What do we know:

- there is no concentration of any big part of metal/aluminum to be found
- the found pieces are no deeper then 20 cm (covering the whole area) – sometimes as little as only a few centimetres - and scattered over a very large area.
- parachute harness pieces have been found – prove that there were casualties on board
- ammunition dated 1944

So to conclude:

- that it is in fact the crash site of Lancaster ME846
- that the prove is there that an enormous explosion has taken place at the scene – (as written in the book)
- that the aircraft was scattered over a large area in many tiny pieces and that already a lot has been recovered during the war. (*by the German "Bergungstruppe". K.M.*)

It is therefore that we can come to a closure for the search of Captain Davis as:

- in all fairness we can say that Captain Davis most likely disintegrated in the crash/explosion (or that perhaps even parts of him were buried along with the two other victims)
- that it is not opportune – based on what we learned on the crash site – to do a major recovery because:

1. it is not going to give any answers as to were Captain Davis is. A body is surely not going to be found.
2. it will need a very large amount to do such a recovery for actually nothing. It will bring many more tiny pieces to the surface, bearing in mind that the search area is tremendous large and that the result is going to be more than just disappointing.

There is nothing more actually that we can do, now or in the future, we simply have to give it a rest bearing in mind that we tried to find him, and based on the experience that a further search is going to leave us fruitless.

The crash site is a protected area (as part of a protected "national park") and it will be in the future, in that respect it is perhaps reassuring that it will remain the future undisturbed resting place of Captain Davis.

What are your views on this, Howard – can we relate this to Paul (Stevenson) and the rest of the ME846 family?

If you think it is OK, then please feel free to send this mail around to all members.

Photos of the latest finds will be sent in due course after the pieces have been cleaned.

Many regards,
Wim Govaerts

Paul Stevenson asked the British War Ministry about the bombload of the Lancaster and received on 19 may 2011 following answer:

Lancaster ME846 from 61. squadron started from Dunholme Lodge on 21.06.1944 at 23.01 hrs for a raid on Wesseling, (Germany) with a bombload as follows:

-1x4.000 lb bom + 16x500 lb bombs.

133 Lancasters and 6 Mosquitos started for a raid on the oil raffinery of Wesseling. German nightfighters – warned by their radarsystem, discovered the fleet and hunted after the enemy planes.

37 Lancasters (6 from 619. squadron) where shot down.

From other documents, found in German achives, we know that ME846 was shot at 01.13 hrs a.m., at the location 4 km N of Mol-Postel and 18 km ESE from Turnhout.

The German "Bergungstruppe" has collected two bodies en buried them at a graveyard of Deurne (near Antwerp)

After the war the "R.A.F. Missing Research" did an intensive search in Postel for the body of pilot Davis, without any results.

Conclusion: the explosion of the heavy bombload and the tons of kerosine in the air, gave such high temperature **that the body of Davis was completely pulverised.**

The finding of two other bodies on the plane can explained: the plane broke in pieces and the man where at the tailsection.



Exposition of fragments in the abbey of Mol-Postel on 3 and 4 december 2011.



Final exploration on 9 mei **2013**. after hours of hard labour, refreshments are welcome



View on the crater, two planehunters at work.



Chapter 13. Chronology of the follow-up (till September 2016)

Every year in September (liberation of Mol in 1944) and on November, 11 (official armistice day in Belgium for both wars) a gathering takes place on the war-monuments and wargraves in Mol. "We will remember them!"

From Mrs Jane Knox and Studium Generale vzw flowers are placed at the monument for every remembrance day. Sometimes also anonymous visitors bring flowers. The monument is on a resting point of a tourist/recreational bicycle path. Every day interested people stop at the monument.



Mol-Postel
Since the inauguration in September, 2006, flowers are placed at the monument. The crew is certainly not forgotten.





Fresh flowers at the monument



2016, September 3: Remembrance to the 10th anniversary of the inauguration of the Lancaster monument

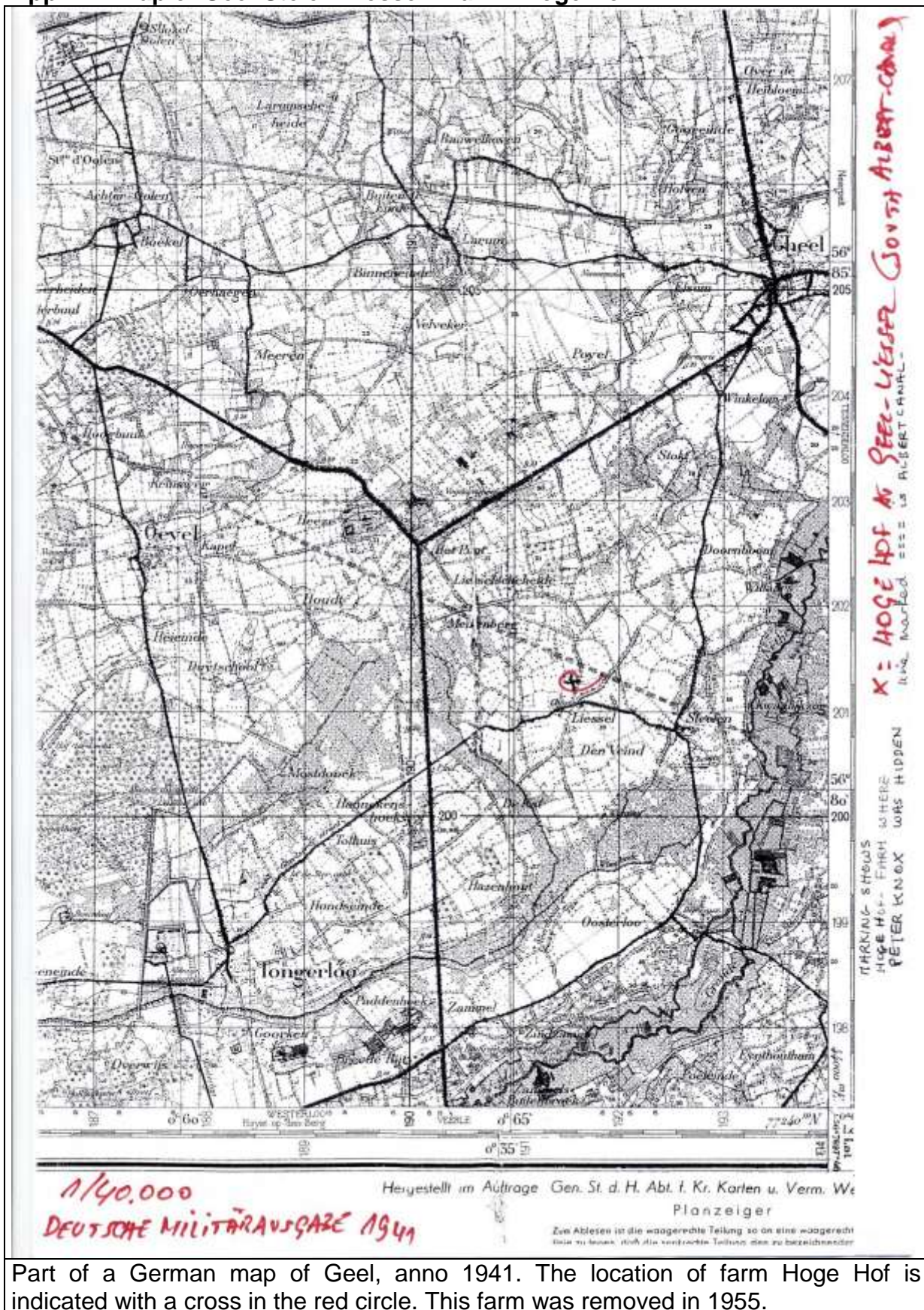
Thank you!

Everybody mentioned in “De laatste vlucht van Lancaster ME846, Mol-Postel, 22 juni 1944”, and for this **Pictorial History** especially Johan Claes, secretary of Studium Generale vzw and translator (Dutch-English) of the complete work.

Kamiel Mertens.

Appendices

App. 1. – Map of Geel-Stelen-Liessel – farm “Hoge Hof”



Part of a German map of Geel, anno 1941. The location of farm Hoge Hof is indicated with a cross in the red circle. This farm was removed in 1955.

App. 2. Map Mol-Postel - Balen



Map of Mol-Postel (2006). nr 1= location of the Lancaster monument, nr 2= crater of the Lancaster plane. The monument can be visited, following the Bergeyksedijk or Bladelseweg (see the map). The crater can be found in the wood, approx. 800 m to the north of the monument. The road approaching the crater is not suitable for cars.

App. 3. Sketch of an Avro Lancaster

