

SPEECH September 23th 2017 at the booklaunch

Major Kappert, Marleen Jennissen, Marcel Hogenhuis and other members of the board of Stirling W7630 Salvage Foundation, members of the Barr, Price and Runnacles families, other attendees:

As the British member of the Recommending Committee of Stirling W7630 Salvage Foundation and also relative of the bomb-aimer of this Stirling, it is my great honour to speak at this event to posthumously honour the crew of Stirling W7630, code letters MG-M, which was shot down over Echt, **just here behind this restaurant Hof van Herstal**, on the night of 10th September 1942 .

The crew comprised :

- F/Lt. Ron Barr DFC & bar, First Pilot (KIA)
- P/O Irwin Fountain Second Pilot (MIA)
- P/O Eric Cook, Wireless Operator (POW)
- P/O Ronnie Runnacles, Bomb-Aimer (KIA)
- P/O Philip Freberg, Navigator (EVD)
- Sgt. Maurice Pepper DFM, Flight Engineer (MIA)
- Sgt. Peter Price, Tail Turret Gunner (MIA)
- Sgt. John Greenwood, Mid Upper Gunner (MIA)

Of that crew of 8 on board that night, only 2, pilot officers Freberg and Cook survived.
PO Freberg evaded , got back to 7 squadron only to be killed on a later bombing mission in 1943.

Due to the marshy nature of the terrain at the time, only two bodies , those of Flt Lt Barr and PO Runnacles were ever recovered and identified.

The remains of the other 4, PO Fountain and Sgts Pepper, Price and Greenwood are believed to still be in the wreckage of the aircraft.

This month, just over 75 years have passed since the events of that night.

Yet thanks to the untiring efforts of Marleen Jennissen and the other members of the board of Stirling W7630 Salvage Foundation, members of the families of 3 of the crew are here today.

We, four families of the crew and one closely involved veteran navigator (Fl./t Maurice Low RCAF) wrote salvage requests to the Mayor and Aldermen of this municipality, but all were rejected.

Both landowner as municipality are the opinion that the field grave must be preserved so the crew can rest in peace. However daily use of this terrain as arable land, offers the field grave anything but the sanctity of peace and reverence which they claim to respect:

we ask how the use of tractors, ploughing-up the land, and injecting liquid manure into the soil at a location containing the fallen can possibly concord with eternal rest. It is our demand that those who gave the ultimate sacrifice for us all, should receive a decent grave.

It will bring closure to the families whose relatives still lie unrecovered in a foreign field and who fully deserve the burial with military honours they are entitled to ...

The past years the Stirling W7630 Salvage Foundation has worked tirelessly to persuade the municipality of Echt-Susteren and the land owner to allow salvage of the wreckage of the aircraft to take place.

However, salvage of this aircraft wreck seems unlikely for the time being. The next-of-kin of the missing will have to continue living with the uncertainty.

Today, on this special event, Captain Barr's daughter Patricia unfortunately cannot be with us because of healthy problems, so does Rebecca Dutton, niece of MIA Sgt Pepper. But they are with us in our thoughts at this very moment.

In honour of the Stirling W7630 crew, we will receive the book 'Debt of honour' The last flight of Stirling W7630 MG-M, recognizing the crew's bravery and ultimate sacrifice. It tells about the tragic fate of this British bomber who disappeared in the soil at Lilbosch Abbey. This story is not unique- although for us it is- as 57.000 Bomber Command's have lost their lives during WW II.

The way in which the local government deals with us, the relatives of the W7630 crew, and the risks of unexploded heavy aircraft bombs certainly is.

We thank the authors Marleen Jennissen and Marcel Hogenhuis, for telling future generations who these crewmembers were, who gave their lives for us all in that terrible war, 75 years ago. The Foundation has done what concerned citizens in a modern society are expected to do: made the responsible authorities aware of their irresponsible course of action and of their moral duty.
