

**Text frontside.** (It starts with the legends by the photos).

1) At first it was thought that three crew members were killed. For that reason there were only three crosses during the commemoration in 1946.

2) In 1946 the fallen crew was commemorated. From left to right you see the mayor R.D.C.M. van Slijpe, ms. T. van Slijpe-Korevaar, the girls Aria Korevaar, Jans Oudenaarde, Alie Blokland and Bets Vonk. Behind them the schoolteachers Kalden and Van Dijk.

3) One of the machine guns from the Lancaster fell into the hands of the resistance. Here held by left, Eef Horden and right, Jaap den Oudsten.

4) After much digging in 1985 the result was a large mountain of mud but few pieces of the Lancaster. From left to right you see Arie Horden, Gerrit Kon and Goof de Bruin.

5) A part that was found was from the landing gear of the Lancaster.

The five poppies represent the five casualties.

**Text frontside.** (Op zondag 21 mei...)

On Sunday the 21st of May 1944, around 22.30 o'clock, 708 bombers take off from several airbases in Southern England for different raids on Nazi-Germany. As ever their mission is to bomb strategic targets. On this particular night these are Duisburg, Hannover and a Belgian airport. So-called "Intruders" fly with the bombers for protection and to bomb airfields with German fighters, intending to keep these out of the sky.

"Our" bomber, a four engine AVRO Lancaster MK III, with a wingspan of 34 meters, is part of the 166th squadron of the R.A.F., which is stationed on airfield Kirmington, about 28 kilometres northwest of Grimsby. The crew consists of a pilot, a bomb aimer, three gunners, of whom one is also wireless operator, one navigator and a mechanic. Seven young men who fulfil their mission each with their own different motives and ideals. Each with his own pleasures, fears and beliefs.

The Lancaster reaches its target the town of Duisburg, marked earlier by torches and marker flairs. They drop their bombs and hit the southern part of the city. 124 people are killed on the ground, 350 buildings are destroyed and 665 are seriously damaged.

When the mission is fulfilled the plane curves back to the west, back to base, back to England. But there is no time for relaxation. The Lancaster is still flying above enemy territory. Not only do the anti-aircraft guns (flak) pose a serious threat, but the Germans also have very effective combat fighters. In contrast with the American bombers, the so-called "Flying Fortresses", the Lancasters do not have a turret with machine guns on the bottom of the plane. If a German Messerschmitt BF-110 manages to reach a spot below the Lancaster unseen, the situation is very dangerous.

The bombers fly on an altitude of approximately 6000 meters when an enemy Messerschmitt manages to intrude into the formation unseen. When it flies about 50 meters below the Lancaster it shoots, with the machine gun, a salvo at an upwards angle.

It is a direct hit; heavily burning the plane crashes. It comes down in the polder Zuidzijde, behind the house of the then Mayor R.D.C.M. van Slijpe, 134 Zuidzijde Goudriaan.

At about 2.00 o'clock that night inhabitants hear heavy machine gun fire and see the burning plane coming down close to the houses. Due to the tremendous heat coming off the wreck it is impossible to come closer to it than about 150 metres. After a short time soldiers of the German Feldgendarmerie arrive to fence off the terrain. A worker of the municipality Teus den Dikken is assigned, later that day, to search for the human remains. On the same day, at about 19.00 o'clock, the victims are buried in a provisional grave on the graveyard in Goudriaan.

In addition to this Lancaster the R.A.F. lost another 30 bombers and fighters that night. Ten crashed in the Netherlands. Planes that brought hope for liberation, manned by young men, who again and again put their lives at stake under enormous pressure. One hit of the artillery or a grenade from an unobserved fighter would mean a certain death. But they went, ... so we should be free.

### **Text backside.** (Hierbij vindt U...)

Hereby you find the history of Sergeant John Frederick Tomney, one of the two survivors. When he goes aboard the Lancaster as a mechanic in the evening of May 21, 1944, he is 22 years of age. This is his 13<sup>th</sup> mission, which will end so unfortunately. In the first Red Cross parcel which he receives as a P.O.W. a blank diary is included. In it, John takes notes about his whereabouts from May 22, 1944, until April 20, 1945. He writes....

### **Legends by the photos.**

- 1) Sergeant John Tomney posing for his service card photo. Name, service number and 166 Squadron.
- 2) John Tomney around May 1944 on a photograph made by the Germans. His face shows the signs of the major events of the past months.
- 3) Some drawings from his journal where John, with some humour, shows what happens day by day.
- 4) Notes in the journal wherein John describes the awful trip he and thousands had to make when the P.O.W.'s were moved in western direction.
- 5) The Tiendwegse Mill in Giessendam where John Tomney landed with his parachute on May 22, 1944, and where the old couple Vogel took care of him.
- 6) John in 1990 near the small shed by the Tiendwegse Mill in Giessendam. "Good to be back for a moment!"

### **John's story.** (...we bereikten ons doel...)

...we reached the target without meeting any enemy defences, we went in and bombed and flew westward. When we were within 2 minutes of Amsterdam we were illuminated by fighter flares. The next minute our port wing was ablaze and cannon shells were exploding in the fuselage. The "skipper" in a tone that was commanding yet inspiring said, "Out you get boys" whereupon I went forward and ditched the exit losing one of my flying boots in the operation, the other I lost when I baled out. The altitude was approximately 21.000.

On the way down I began to think would I drop in the sea, remembering there was a God I began to pray, praying that if I dropped in the sea He would make things easy. After having floated down for about two or three minutes I began to go through thick layers of cloud, it was very cold. The clouds broke and I could see the ground coming up to meet me, before I knew where I was, I was struggling for dear life in what I found to be a dyke. After managing to rid myself of parachute and Mae West, I clambered out of the dyke, shook myself and then discovered and felt utterly lost.

Upon finding what appeared to be a cart track I immediately began to run along it until my feet felt sore, there upon I stopped and in the distance I could see an aircraft burning. "Is that ours...? Did the rest of the crew get out safely? Will I meet up with them?"

Numerous questions of that type kept buzzing around my mind. Why I did it I don't know but I began to walk back along the cart track and before long I came to a mill, so I stopped to have a look round the outhouses but everything was locked, next thing that struck me was to get my wet clothes off and dried. After I got the miller out of bed I was invited into the living room where I met his wife, an elderly woman around the sixty. I began to think the Dutch were a set of dimwits as while I stood there shivering the old couple was nattering away, eventually the fire was lit and I took off my clothes and hung them to dry. Coffee, bread and cheese seemed to be next on the list but I didn't feel hungry, just tired and ill.

May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1944

I slept till about six o'clock when the miller handed me a cup of tea, an egg and more bread and cheese, which I eat with relish feeling hungry by now. Never have I been more surprised in my life as I did when a Dutch policeman walked in, said "Good morning", shook hands with me and came out with a "God save the King." Shortly after the first policeman arrived another turned up and then I was taken away to the police station of Sleivgort (ment is Sliedrecht). The feldgendarmes arrived about 11. a.m. and I was driven to their H.Q.'s at Dortruk I believe (ment is Dordrecht). It was there I met our navigator Bruce Bird, but I was not allowed to converse with him. A woman who spoke English very well tried to extract information from me, but I am afraid I disappointed her. A dinner was brought to me while I was waiting to be taken to Tilburg. The navigator and myself were both searched for the first time at Tilburg since being taken prisoners and then we were put into single cells with hard wooden beds to sleep on. For myself I was so tired I just lay down and dropped off."

John and Bruce survived the war. They were in a Prisoners of War camp, Stalag Luft VII in Bankau Poland, far in the east. The Germans did that to make it extra difficult for escapees: they had to travel a large distance and so the chance to be rearrested was greater.

On January the 18<sup>th</sup> of 1945 the Soviet Army approached the camp and the P.O.W.'s were pressed to walk in the western direction. This awful trip ended on February 8<sup>th</sup> 1945, the day they arrived in another German P. O. W.-camp Lückenwalde. On April 20<sup>th</sup> 1945, they were liberated by Allied Forces. After 10 months and 29 days John and Bruce were free again.

John and Bruce went back to England on May 29<sup>th</sup> 1945. Bruce Bird married Jean and became a farmer again. After some years they went to Wolverhampton. Bruce helped his father in law with the paint shop. In March 1957 they emigrated to Australia and they got two sons. He was working in a paint shop again, but got after a few years the opportunity

to work for his own. He died in May 24<sup>th</sup> 1999 in Australia.

John spent his working life in several Arab countries as a technician in oil. He married Joyce who gave him three sons.

His whole life one question has dominated his life: why he was allowed to live, while his "brothers in arms" were killed. If they had had a few seconds more they too may have had the opportunity to jump and to live. John died on March 18<sup>th</sup> 1994. His ashes were, at his request, scattered by his wife and sons next to his comrades. As proof of that a small sign is placed by the graves and memorial.