

THE SEARCHLIGHT

APRIL
2020



Content of april '20

Contact and support SLO Drenthe

3

460 Sqn Vetrans & Friends Group

4

Operation Amherst

6

Drama of Diever

10

Short Stirling

12

The last, missing photo

15

The Liberationfestival of Southeast Drenthe

18

Editor: Peter van der Weide, secretary SLO Drenthe



Short
Stirling

The aircraft of the S.A.S. and S.O.E.



Liberation of
Camp Westerbork



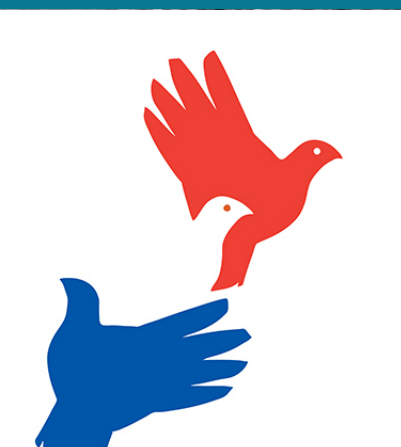
Operation Amherst



Jack Stanley Biffen



Dutch en German officers
made p.o.w.



Liberationfestival
postponed



The drama of Diever



Last photo

The last, missing photo for the cemetery at
Schoonebeek is found.



Operation
Amherst

In the night of the 7th and 8th of April, two
groups of French SAS were dropped in Drenthe.



TILL WE MEET AGAIN

Do you want to help?

We are pleased and grateful with even the smallest donation to support our work!

Do you have objects, photos or other materials from the war? Please, remember us.

We are also looking for volunteers who want to place a candle at Commonwealth war graves in their immediate surroundings on Christmas Eve.

Stichting Luchtoorlog Onderzoek Drenthe

IBAN: NL45 RBRB 0706 5726 37

To register as a volunteer or for questions, please send an email to: info@slo-drenthe.nl

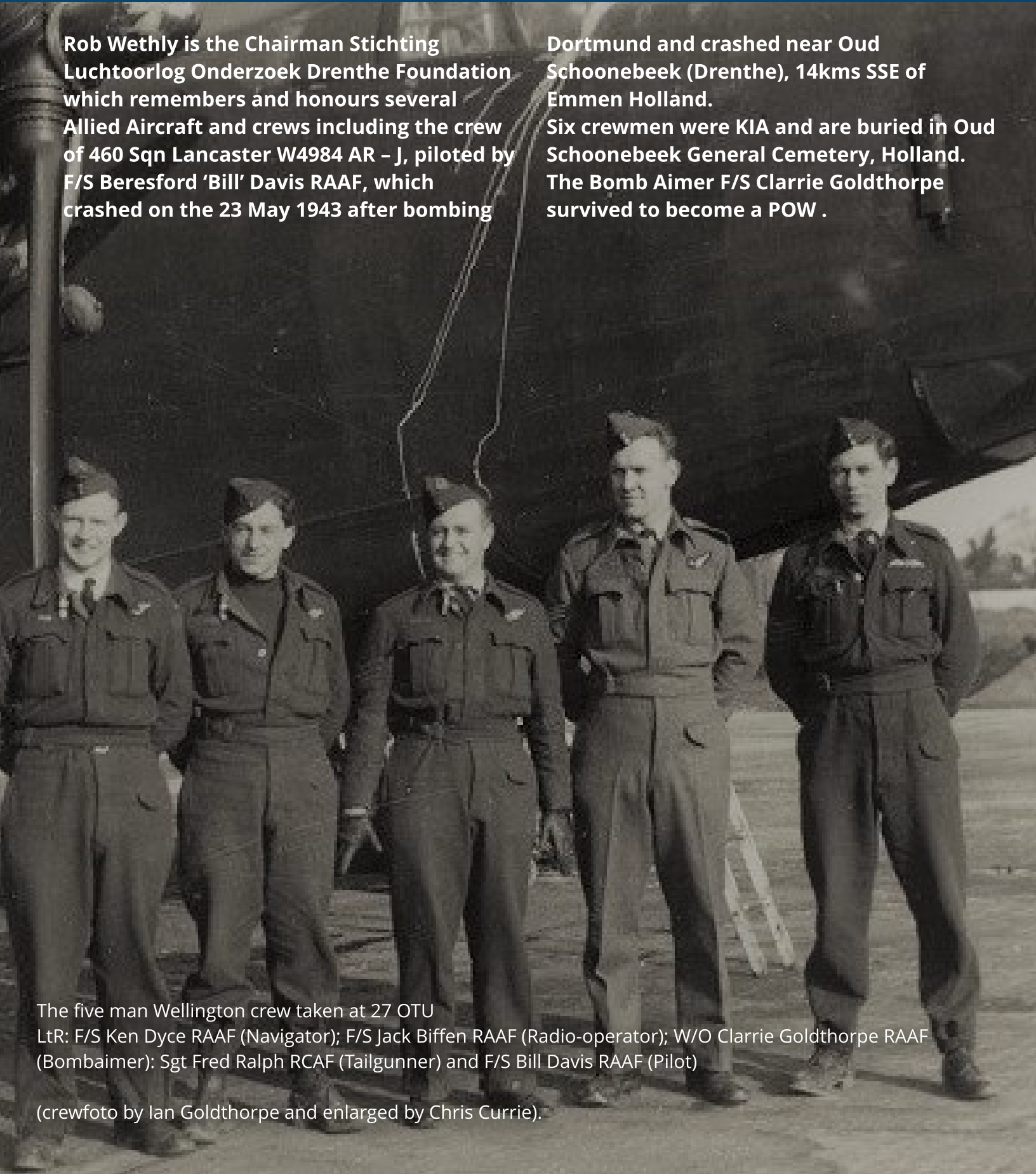
BUY WAR BONDS

460 SQUADRON VETRANS & FRIENDS GROUP

Rob Wethly is the Chairman Stichting Luchtoorlog Onderzoek Drenthe Foundation which remembers and honours several Allied Aircraft and crews including the crew of 460 Sqn Lancaster W4984 AR - J, piloted by F/S Beresford 'Bill' Davis RAAF, which crashed on the 23 May 1943 after bombing

Dortmund and crashed near Oud Schoonebeek (Drenthe), 14kms SSE of Emmen Holland.

Six crewmen were KIA and are buried in Oud Schoonebeek General Cemetery, Holland. The Bomb Aimer F/S Clarrie Goldthorpe survived to become a POW .



The five man Wellington crew taken at 27 OTU

LtR: F/S Ken Dyce RAAF (Navigator); F/S Jack Biffen RAAF (Radio-operator); W/O Clarrie Goldthorpe RAAF (Bombaimer); Sgt Fred Ralph RCAF (Tailgunner) and F/S Bill Davis RAAF (Pilot)

(crewfoto by Ian Goldthorpe and enlarged by Chris Currie).

The Foundation's newsletter 'The Searchlight 2019' highlights the honour given to them by the Aviation Heritage Lincolnshire (<http://www.slo-drenthe.nl/news/yearedition2019.pdf>):

"In September 2019 we were pleasantly surprised by the receipt of a special recognition. Air War Research Foundation Drenthe is an official part of Aviation Heritage Lincolnshire, U.K.....for all the important work we have done in recent years for WWII RAF, RCAF and RAAF Bomber Command crew members who fell for our freedom today."

On behalf of all in 460 squadron RAAF, congratulation to the Foundation – very well deserved and earned.

The gravestone photo of Flight Sergeant Jack Stanley Biffen RAAF: At Rob Wethly's request over five years ago, Sydney Historian Trudy Holdsworth and the Editor have enlisted many people to try to locate the family of the only survivor of the Crew of W4983, AR-J's Bomb Aimer F/S Clarence Goldthorpe. The reason was that each and every gravestone in the Oud Schoonebeek cemetery has a photo of the airman attached to his gravestone (see photo) – except one – W4983 Wireless Operator F/S Jack Stanley Biffen RAAF.

We had literally given up hope when the Editor made the final link in this long saga by finding Clarrie's son Ian. Ian Goldthorpe agreed to search his late father's files and trunk. On Tuesday 10 March, when I arrived at Ian's house to drive him to the 460 Sqn lunch at Watsons Bay, Ian showed me a crew photo he had found – with the crew names written on the back by his father (taken when they were a five man crew under a Wellington bomber at their Operational Training Unit). F/S Jack Stanley Biffen was staring out at us! After scanning the photo and making close ups of the faces, the Editor emailed Rob Wethly & Ian Goldthorpe – Rob was incredibly excited and thankful. The enigma of Jack Stanley Biffen had one final twist.

Clarrie Goldthorpe had named the crew in opposite order to how they were standing, with him in the middle. As Rob Wethly knows this crew very well, he detected that the person we believed to be Jack Stanley Biffin was actually the Rear Gunner Sgt Fred Ralph RCAF. So the correct face is now attached to the gravestone of F/S Jack Stanley Biffen RAAF. After years, the crew's current portrait rack and the gravestone portraits are now completed:.



Chairman Rob Wethly at the wargraves to place the missing photo.

AMHERST



Two groups of the French SAS are dropped in the night of 7 to 8 April above Drenthe to the left and right of the line Assen-Hoogeveen- Meppel. Their mission is:

- Capture bridges in the mission area or prevent their destruction.
- Provide information about the condition of the bridges to the Canadian headquarters.
- Prevent the destruction of the airports of Steenwijk, Eelde and Leeuwarden.
- Create as much confusion as possible.

- Encourage and organize the local resistance.
- Provide as much information as possible to the Canadians and act as a guide.

But of all the bridges, only those in Smilde and Appelscha are successfully conquered. No fewer than 140 bridges were destroyed in the whole of Drenthe in the spring of 1945.

The French jump in 47 groups, "sticks", of 15 men from 47 Stirling planes.

Due to the bad weather, the high altitude at which the paratroopers jump and a bad

navigation, the different sticks come down scattered.

Two landed in the central area of Assen, some others on retreating Germans.

For all these reasons, the soldiers quickly seek contact with the local population to orient themselves. Where possible, the paratroopers, supported by the resistance, start attacking German units the same night.

Isolated groups of paratroopers mainly try to survive with the help of the population. The Germans retribution is very hard.

Gasselte

The French who land at Gasselte decided to attack the rectory. The rectory had been confiscated by the Nationalsozialistische Kraftfahr Korps (NSKK) to make it their headquarters.

The attack started around noon. There was heavy shooting from the rectory on the French paratroopers. Corporal Bégue was killed and Sergeant Briand was wounded. In the end, the NSKK people retreated, but a few had hid in the basement.

These hidden people saw that the rectory was looted by the Dutch after the departure of the French. Over 300 men from the village were imprisoned in the church on charges of looting. The Germans threatened to blow up the church with all the men in it.

After mediation by the NSB mayor, all men were released except for the 16 men who should have reported for participating in the looting.

These men were taken on foot to Gieten and then

locked in a refrigerator truck. They were then transferred to the prison in Assen on April 11, 1945.

Two days later, on Friday, April 13, 1945, they were released from prison by the Canadians.



A Dutch and German
NSKK officer



German pow near Gasselte



French Sas with pow's near Gasselte

Accidents

Paratroopers did not only die as a result of combat, but also as a result of accidents. Beilen's cemetery contains the grave of Sergeant Yago Ragnacci, who drowned in a ditch after his jump. Jean Marie Ravenel, buried in Smilde, gets into trouble when his parachute gets tangled with the parachute of a container. He is crushed by the container.

Assen

The paratroopers here spend a night in the farm barn of mister Mulder, because the area is made unsafe by Germans and the Landwacht. Still, on the morning of Tuesday, April 10, they get into a fight with the Landwacht again. During the hour-long firefight, the thatched roof of the barn is set on fire and collapses. Three paratroopers perish in the flames. Three others are fatally wounded. On April 13, 1945, the



SAS in the forest near Assen

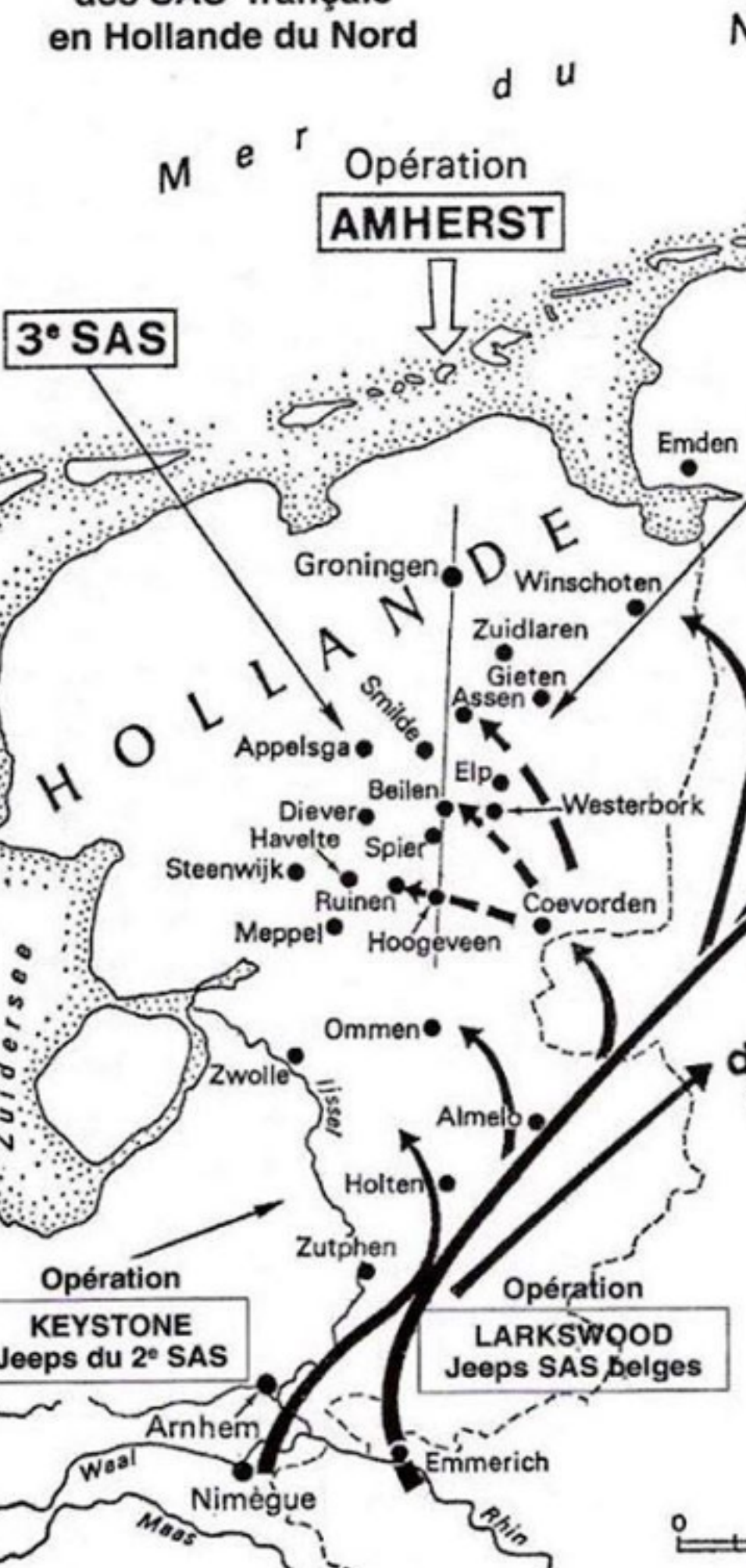
Canadians liberate two French paratroopers in the Assen House of Detention. The liberation came too late for three paratroopers: they were executed on April 10, 1945, together with seven captured resistance fighters. This was ordered by the SD commander Wilhelm Petri. There was a discussion with SD-man Weber. Weber did not want to shoot "uniformed men" he said later during the trial. But if Commander Petri suggests shooting them on the run, Weber doesn't think that's a good idea either. Petri is sentenced to death in absentia.

Weber has to go to jail for 19 years, but is brought back to Germany because of a mental breakdown.



Re-enactment photo from the Asser Courant of April 13, 2019

OPÉRATION AMHERST des SAS français en Hollande du Nord



Murder in Fluitenberg

The paratroopers make contact with the Lunenburg, Scholing, Strijker and Fox families. Captured Germans were housed in the Vos farm.

The Germans discover the presence of the French and start fighting from the Spaarbankbos. The French defended themselves fiercely from the Vos farm. Some residents of Hoogeveen with military clothing, fight with the French. The Vos farm catches fire and a German ammunition car explodes. The paratroopers retreat eastwards with the German prisoners behind the tracks.

The Germans take revenge on the residents of the Wijsterseweg and some passers-by.

The enraged Germans first invade Scholing's farm and shoot four members of the family there. Part of the local population and some people in hiding were taken prisoner. A young NSB nurse helped the German commander with the first selection of the prisoners. This released many and others were taken with the retreating Germans.

They spend the night with a farmer in Eursinge.

Hayo Wubs is believed to be shot on the run.

The other fourteen are executed in the forest near Pesse by a department of the Grüne Polizei.

DRAMA OF DIEVER



Drama of Diever

In Diever, the French paratroopers seek direct contact with the local resistance. They thought that the liberation had started. First, on April 8, NSB mayor Posthumus was arrested by the resistance. But the French are not the liberators. On the morning of April 10, some NSB evacuees are nevertheless beaten. One of these NSB members managed to escape to Steenwijk, where his son was part of a Waffen-SS department. Early in the afternoon, the alarmed Germans arrive in Diever to restore order. They split into two groups. One group arrests random civilians while the other group takes

action against the French paratroopers. At that time, the local commander of the Interior Forces tried to get the French to remove the NSB members to avoid further difficulties.

Two of his people are standing behind the cemetery waiting for their commander to return when they are surprised by the arrival of the SS. They flee over the bare field to the woods and are shot at. One resistance fighter is killed.

In the firefight that follows with the parachutists in the village, about 10 SS men are killed, including the Ortskommandant of Steenwijk. In the course of the afternoon, 11 civilians are taken hostage, aged 14 to 62, and eventually brought together.

Hours later, the furious SD commander of Steenwijk arrives; SS Hauptscharführer Habener. He shoots his weapon at the hostages. Only the slightly injured Mr. Westerhof survives the execution by staying dead for hours.

After the Germans left, the bodies were laid out in the

Schulterhuis.

Around noon Dwingeloo is liberated by the Canadian army, but at the Drentse Hoofdvaart they cannot continue because the bridge of Dieverbrug has been destroyed. The commander fears that the advance will be delayed by three days. But together with volunteers, a temporary bridge is made from remnants of the Wittelterbrug.

In the early morning of April 12, the first combat vehicles cross the temporary bridge and Diever is liberated. But the contrast between grieving and partying people is great.



CAMP WESTERBORK

Westerbork

In Westerbork the hotel is stormed where the German generalmajor Karl Böttger has its headquarters.

Böttger has been commander of Feldkommandantur 674 in the city of Groningen since March 1944. In April 1945 he was given command of the defense of Midden-Drenthe, a 26-kilometer-long line along the Hoogetveensche Vaart. During the attack, the general is injured but manages to escape.

Polish tanks approached on April 10, 1945. Liaison officer van der Veer went by bicycle to the town hall in Westerbork, where NSB mayor Pijbes and seven council members immediately surrendered. Shortly afterwards camp commander Gemmeker called Camp Westerbork who heard rumors about approaching tanks and soldiers.

Van der Veer replied in English as a sign that the Allies were approaching. The commander packed his things and left camp Westerbork.



Chief-sergeant Stoel, his wife
and commando-resistance man
Willem van der Veer

SHORT STIRLING

The front and top turrets were removed and faired over, with the front fitted with clear perspex. A small seat was fitted at the front so that navigator could map read to the target. Later, on some Mk IV's, the aluminium panels between the bombaimer's window and the perspex in place of the front turret, were substituted for clear perspex as well, to further aid map reading. The Stirling would drop containers, panniers and paratroops.

The MK IV was also fitted with 'Rebecca' and 'S' phone equipment,

The Rebecca was a shortwave radio receiver that picked up the signals from the Eureka on the ground. Rebecca comes from "Recognition of beacons" and Eureka is Greek for "I found it".

The S-Phone was a wireless telephone.

Both were used for ground communication with the drop zone on SOE and paratrooper dropping operation.

For 'comfort', the paratroopers sat on the floor of the Stirling on eight Numnah rubber mats.



STIRLING MK IV

There was a second Elsan fitted at the rear on the port side and sanitary tubes were provided. The paratrooper exit hole was in the floor behind the bomb bay, the edges of the hole were rounded for a smooth exit and covered by a wooden folding floor panel. As the paratrooper jumped, occasionally he would bang his steel helmet on the edge of the hole if too close – this became known as ringing the bell. A static rail was fitted at shoulder height on each side of the fuselage, each holding eleven small rollers to which the parachute strops could be quickly attached. The paratroopers were given a stick number. Odds would hook up to port and even to starboard. To avoid dropping containers at the same instant that a man was jumping, a green light interrupter system was installed.

The heaviest container was dropped first. Each container was loaded up to a maximum of 350 lbs and fitted with a 28-foot cotton parachute. The position of each container in the bomb bay critical to the weight and balance of the Stirling.



+++++

DE STRIJD IN ONS VADERLAND. De strijd in ons land ontwikkelt zich zeer gunstig, doch nog steeds worden de berichten met de grootste voorzichtigheid doorgegeven. Bovendien wil men door het vermelden van de geallieerde successen en de juiste positie der legers, den vijand geen waardevolle inlichtingen verschaffen. Derhalve zijn de berichten wazig, maar tusschen de regels door kunnen wij daaruit toch opmaken, dat de situatie aan alle frontdeelen in ons land volkomen door de geallieerden wordt beheerscht. De in ons land neergelaten parachutisten verrichten uitstekend werk. In een frontbericht werden hedenmorgen hun operaties een succes genoemd. Het geallieerde hoofdkwartier deelt ten aanzien van deze operaties mede, dat de parachutisten hun door de radio verstrekte opdrachten uitstekend weten uit te voeren. Alle contact met het leger is nog niet nodig, want ze weten zichzelf uitstekend te redden. Het kan niet anders of deze parachutisten zijn in den nacht van Zaterdag op Zondag over een zeer uitgebreid gebied geland. De berichten welke althans doorgegeven worden getuigen daarvan. Een oorlogscorrespondent van "Exchange Telegraph" berichtte gisterenmiddag dat de neergelaten luchtlandingstroepen een verbinding hadden tot stand gebracht met gepantserde eenheden van de 4e Canadeesche divisie. Dit had plaats op 15 km. ten Noord-Oosten van Zwolle, langs de spoorlijn naar Meppel. Gisteravond deelde Radio Oranje mede, dat Canadeesche troepen hun verbinding met de parachutisten hadden tot stand gebracht ergens ten Zuiden van Groningen. Dit bericht werd nog eens met nadruk herhaald, waarmee men waarschijnlijk te kennen wilde geven, dat hier de stad Groningen en niet de provincie werd bedoeld. In dat geval zouden de luchtlandingsoperaties dus hebben plaats gehad over een gebied dat vrijwel geheel Drenthe en een deel van Overijssel bestrijkt. De parachutisten hebben voorts een belangrijke spoorburg opgeblazen en zij veroverden een belangrijk wegenknooppunt, welke evenwel nog niet nader aangeduid kon worden.

De steden Meppel en Zwolle worden thans hevig bedreigd. Volgens Radio Amerika zijn de Canadeezen reeds in Meppel doorgedrongen en staan zij op dat punt 10 km. van het IJsselmeer. Reuter meldt dat een dijk is opgeblazen tusschen Meppel en Zwolle, waardoor 50 vierkant kilometer water is komen te staan. Hierdoor zijn alle Duitse troepen geïsoleerd en hebben zij nog één uitweg naar het Noorden. Volgens Radio Amerika deelde voorts mede, dat de Duitsers thans verder oprukken naar het Noorden langs de IJssel, dat de geallieerden hier de IJssel zo verdedigen. De geallieerde troepen ten Westen van de IJssel bedreigen de Duitsers, waarvan zeker 20.000 geïsoleerde gevechten vindt zich aan de IJsellinie. Vanaf Zutphen stroomt de IJssel naar het Noorden, dat is de richting der Duitse handen. Tusschen de Duitse troepen en de geallieerde troepen is de strijd zeer hevig.



De Britten hebben de rivier de Leine gevestigd. Zoowel Bremen als Hannover is in brand.

THE LAST MISSING PHOTO

In recent years I have searched extensively for photos of the soldiers who fell during the Second World War, who have been buried in the general cemetery in Schoonebeek since the end of the war.

The search for the 25 faces of the fallen was not an easy one and as always the last mile is the longest, or as in this case, the difficult and almost impossible way to find photos. The first photos were mostly found quickly. So archive research, contact with relatives, newspaper archives and the internet quickly yielded the first photos....

And then it gets more difficult and I have chosen to trace relatives with whom I was not in contact with the help of family tree research and also to contact historical associations in the hometown and / or former residence of the fallen soldier. That resulted in a number of still missing photos and also the necessary valuable contacts with these surviving relatives.

During that search of years, I had managed to give 23 of the 25 war graves a face again and two names remained without a face for a long time, namely Guy Dermot Spyers from England and Jack Stanley Biffen from Australia. In January 2019 I managed to get a picture of Guy Dermot Spyers from family on his mother's side.

More about this quest and the special story, in the next edition.



Jack Stanley Biffen

That last photo, of which I only hoped and had used all options.

In the search for the photo of Jack Stanley Biffen, I came into contact with several distant relatives of Jack Stanley Biffen in Australia with unfortunately the same negative result, no photo or photos of which the person in the photo is unknown.

With the help of Sydney-based Historica Trudy Holdsworth and the editor of 460 Squadron Veterans & Friends Group, Richard Munro, we finally managed to trace two of Jack Stanley Biffen's second cousins in Australia, after contact was soon made clear that neither could provide the wanted photo of Jack Stanley Biffen. Even calls in local media and newspapers in Australia did not yield the sought-after picture or even a possible option. In desperation and now many years further and My very last option was to trace the family of Clarence Goldthorpe and with the available data I managed to find further valuable information, but unfortunately due to privacy laws I was unable to obtain



address details. While I was stranded, Richard Munro and his editors succeeded and the son of Clarence Goldthorpe, Ian Goldthorpe was traced. utilized all possibilities without the desired result, only one option remained. In the crash of the Lancaster W4984 AR-J of the 460 AAF squadron, of which Jack Stanley Biffen was a radiographer, not everybody died. The bombaimer Clarence Goldthorpe left the aircraft in time using a parachute and survived the war as a prisoner of war in Germany and returned to the Australia.

My very last option was to trace the family of Clarence Goldthorpe and with the available data I managed to

find further valuable information, but unfortunately due to privacy laws I was unable to obtain address details. While I was stranded, Richard Munro and his editors succeeded and the son of Clarence Goldthorpe, Ian Goldthorpe was traced.



...I quickly discovered that the names in the photo had to be read in reverse order...

After a phone call and a visit, Richard Munro managed to get Ian Goldthorpe excited to search the old photo books of his deceased father.

This was really the last chance to find another picture of Jack Stanley Biffen!

On Tuesday, March 10, when Richard Munro arrived at Ian Goldthorpe's house to jointly attend a 460 Squadron lunch at Watsons Bay, Ian Goldthorpe showed a crew photo he found in one of his father's photo books, featuring on the back handwritten by his father, the names of the crew members.

The photo shows five crewmembers in front of a Wellington bomber during their operational training

in Canada ... Including Jack Stanley Biffen!

After scanning the photo and taking close-ups of the faces, Richard Munro sends me the photos by email and I am pleasantly surprised, incredibly impressed, excited and grateful, I read the email and look at the photos and see Jack Stanley Biffen and know my quest is accomplished, 25 out of 25!

Wrong way around?

The search for the photo of Jack Stanley Biffen takes one last turn.

Clarence Goldthorpe had the names of the crew members written in reversed order on the back of the photo, in contrast to how they are shown in the photo, with Clarence Goldthorpe standing in the center. Because I know this crew very well and own a lot of archival documents and photos of the other crew members, I discovered that something was wrong somewhere!

I know that the Lancaster W4984 Fred Ralph's tail gunner was long in stature, which was quite unusual for a tail gunner, because

the tail turret is very small. In this photo, Fred Ralph was almost the smallest of the five and a closer look at the photo revealed even more details that were not right....

And I soon discovered that the names of the crew members present in the photo had to be read in reverse order.

The person who Richard Munro and Ian Goldthorpe thought was Jack Stanley Biffen ... was actually Fred Ralph and so the person who was thought to be Fred Ralph is actually Jack Stanley Biffen!

And with that, this quest comes to a real conclusion and Jack Stanley Biffen has a face again!



2020, 75 YEAR OF FREEDOM



2020, 75 years of liberation a unique year!

The story of the Liberation Festival Schoonebeek 2020 actually starts on December 17, 2017 at a Schoonebeker dining table.

There were Rob Wethly (Air War Research Foundation Drenthe), Ernst-Jan Bouwers (Schoonebeek in Actie) and Kees Veenstra (Schoonebeek in Actie) to think carefully about what they wanted to do for the Liberation Festival in 2020. A memorable year because of 75 years of liberation in the Netherlands. The co-operation between Schoonebeek in Actie and the Air War Research Drenthe Foundation in organizing the Liberation Festival in 2015 was so satisfactory that we at least wanted to set this up again.

Stichting Luchtoorlog Onderzoek Drenthe

The contribution to this great Liberation Festival for the Air War Research Drenthe Foundation would consist of a large and unique exhibition about the 2nd World Air War in this region, with unique stories, background information, objects and documents.

In addition, there is plenty of room for education, special teaching programs for primary schools and on 4 May, commemorating, the opportunity for all surviving relatives to visit the exhibition in a private atmosphere. In particular, many surviving relatives were invited and were willing to attend Schoonebeek for Remembrance Day.

AND THEN EVERYTHING CHANGED

Working out all ideas also gave rise to new insights into how we wanted to shape our presentations, and after a somewhat slow start, we were on course in every way. The testprint of our presentation poster looked good so we can carry on!

But then the corona crisis hit in full force. Monday, March 16, we met as the Steering Group of the Liberation Festival Schoonebeek 2020. There was only one agenda item: what are we going to do?

Given all the reports at the time, we knew: under no circumstances should we take the risk of infection. And we didn't want to compromise on our unique event. After careful consideration, the decision was made to postpone the Liberation Festival and postpone the entire program to next May 2021!

After a few days of reflection and processing of the disappointment, the decision was announced and all the next of kin were subsequently informed. Warm, positive and understanding responses soon followed. They were of course very welcome and that also gives us the courage and energy to carry out that great program with all of us next year, if circumstances permit.

There is already a fantastic basis, looking forward to next year!



EST GRONINGEN.
VASH/ TEL. 6.

1702

25. III. 1944

V E R B A A L
van een Engelsch-
er) in den avond van
rtmeer, gemeente Emmen,

Naar aanleiding van het op Woensdag 22 Maart 1944, te on-
gevoer 21,30 uur, neerstorten van een brandend Engelsch Vlieg-
tuig (bomwerper) aan de Westzijde van de Kamerlingwijk on-
der Zwartemeer, gemeente Emmen, heb ik -
Sietze van der Hoek, Hoofdwachtmeester, behoorende tot opgemeld
Groep, na bekomen opdracht van mijn Groepscommandant een onder-
zoek ingesteld.

Bij aankomst bleek mij, dat het omlaag gestorte Engelsch
vliegtuig was een vier motorige bomwerper, waarvan de wrak-
stukken over eenige honderden meters verspreid lagen.

In verschillende deelen daarvan woedde een hevige
Bij het vliegtuig werden geen brisant- of brandbom-
gevonden.
De motoren en de overgrootste deel van de wrakstukke
onder het vliegtuig en over het veld lagen ver-