

## LANCASTER HUMMELOSEWEG / ZELHEM

23/24 September 1944 R.A.F. raid: Dortmund-Ems Canal near Ladbergen. (Germany)

61 Squadron Royal Air Force – airfield Skellingthorpe.

target: Dortmund-Ems Canal ~ Ladbergen.

136 Lancasters and 5 Mosquitos of 5th Group were dispatched on bombing operations against the Dortmund-Ems Canal to bomb the banks of the 2 parallel branches of the canal at a point near Ladbergen north of Münster where the level of the canal water was well above the level of the surrounding land. Despite the presence of 70% cloud in the target area, breaches were made in the banks of both branches of the canal and a 6-mile stretch of it was drained. Most of the damage was caused by 2 direct hits by 12,000 lbs Tallboy bombs dropped by aircraft of 617 Squadron at the opening of the raid.

14 Lancasters – more than 10% of the Lancaster force - were lost

61 Squadron reported: 13 Lancasters successfully bombed the target. 4 aircraft failed to return.

2 Lancasters returned with bomb load, one to base and one jettisoned bombs not on target.

**Lancaster Mk III Serial Number ED470** t/o 19.20 hrs [QR⊙W] 214 flying hrs.

### Crew:

Captain / Pilot

F/O Albert Keith **HORNIBROOK** †

Age 20

R.A.A.F. 426346

son of James Harold and Amanda  
Louisa Hornibrook of Wilston,  
Queensland, Australia  
Runnymede Memorial, Panel 257

Flight Engineer

Sgt. Tegwyn **ROBERTS** †

Age 22

R.A.F. (VR) 2205764

son of Morris and Margaret Roberts  
of Denbigh (Wales) UK  
Runnymede Memorial, Panel 237

Navigator

F/O John James **CONDON** †

Age 24

R.A.A.F. 412056

son of John and Mary Condon  
of Double Bay, New South Wales,  
Australia.  
Runnymede Memorial, Panel 257

Bomb Aimer

F/O Derek Cecil **HEATHER** †

Age 22

R.A.F. (VR) 153571

son of Edward Cecil E. and Ivy Evelyn  
Heather of Reigate, Surrey, England  
husband of Betty Heather-Meyers of  
Mill Hill, London. UK Betty Meyers † 1999  
Runnymede Memorial, Panel 206

Wireless Operator

Sgt. Robert Stanley **MEACHEN** †

Age 23

R.A.F. (VR) 1124861

son of Norman and Elizabeth Victoria  
Meachen of Billingham, County Durham  
husband of Doreen Meachen of  
Stockton-on-Tees County Durham. UK  
Runnymede Memorial, Panel 234

Mid-Upper Gunner

Sgt. Thomas **BROWN** †

Age 25

R.A.F. (VR) 1171420

son of Thomas and T. Brown  
husband of Hilda Brown of Southport /  
Lancashire. UK  
Runnymede Memorial, Panel 226

Rear Gunner

Sgt. John G. **MILLER**

Age 24

R.A.F. 2212940. (VR)

Address 1945

187 Thelwell Lane

Latchford / Warrington Lancs.

died about 1990

only survivor, stayed at farm "Achterkamp"  
at Zuidloo near Bathmen - (NL) husband of  
Rosslyn Miller of Warrington, Lancashire,  
England. first married to: Tilly Reterink from  
Deventer, Netherlands.  
Helped by Dutch Underground to escape.  
Returned to UK in April 1945.



## SOLVING THE MISTERY OF A RAF-BOMBER

There was a mistake about the fate of ED470 and its crew for a long time. MOD / London and other sources (Loss Card, Chorley) stated that ED470 went down into the river Rijn/Waal near Bommel/Huissen south of Arnhem-The Netherlands.

Some relatives were told their loved ones were lost over Germany (*Meachen family*) and some others were told ED470 went down into the River Rijn/Waal. Below part of a letter from MOD to the *Heather* family dated 21<sup>st</sup> July 1986:

Our records show that F/O Heather was the bomb aimer of Lancaster ED 470 of No 61 Squadron, which took off from its base at Skellingthorpe at 19-20 hours on 23 September 1944, to attack Munster.

The full crew was:-

F/O A K Hornibrook	(Pilot) <i>Avic</i>	Sgt R S Meachen	(Wireless OP) <i>Co. Dutch</i>
Sgt T Roberts	(Plt engineer) <i>Dunbigh</i>	Sgt J G Miller	(Air gnr)
F/O J J Condan	(Navigator) <i>Russ</i>	Sgt T Brown	( " " )
F/O D C Heather	(Bomb Aimer)		<i>Southwest Lancs.</i>

Sgt Miller was a survivor, and he stated on his return after being held as a POW that the aircraft was on fire in the air when he baled out. He saw it crash, but was not sure of the crash place.

Regretfully, Sgt Miller was the only survivor. Dutch resistance workers saw the Lancaster crash in the middle of the River Rijn/Waal, and no-one else baled out or left the aircraft when it hit the water. None of the bodies of the remaining six occupants of the aircraft were even found, and it is assumed that they either remained in the aircraft or were washed out to sea. The place of the crash is adjacent to the district Bommel-Huissin.

All missing members of this crew are recorded on the Air Forces Memorial at Runnymede, near Windsor, which is dedicated to all those airmen who lost their lives in North West Europe and have no known grave.

The target wasn't Münster but Ladbergen (Dortmund-Ems Canal) and Sgt. Miller never became a Prisoner of War (POW) he escaped and was helped by the Dutch Underground stayed six months' at the "Achterkamp" farm near Zuidloo in the east of The Netherlands till he was liberated by Canadian Army Forces on April 6<sup>th</sup> 1945.

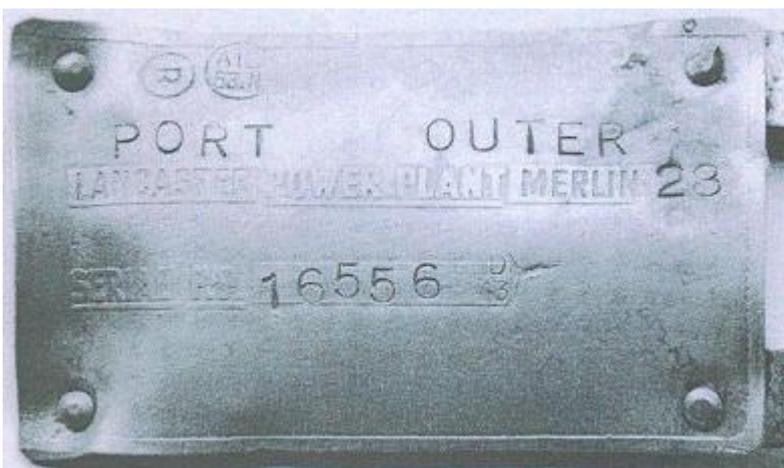
AVOG started research already in 1975 and found out that it couldn't be true that ED470 went down into the river Rijn/Waal near Arnhem. AVOG was convinced the unknown bomber that came down near Zelhem during the evening of 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1944 must have been ED470. AVOG started writing to the local authorities in 2004 and it was not until 2013 that all parties involved were willing to carry out a dig and during October 2013 the project was completed finding the evidence that it was ED470 indeed.



Steelplate originally mounted underneath Pilot's seat with Number 470 painted and scratched by the Technical Ground Crew during maintenance.



During the excavation also the following Rolls Royce engine serial plate was found and experts (*former personnel of the Rolls Royce a/c engine Company*) stated that the plate belonged to a RR Merlin 28 engine and therefore this plate became an additional evidence because ED470 was the only Lanc lost during 23<sup>rd</sup>/24<sup>th</sup> September 1944 equipped with Merlin 28 engines.



Therefore eventually the relatives know for sure now where their loved ones came to death.





± 2500 Kg metal parts etc. were found of ED470

The end of the excavation project became a big frustration for AVOG. As indicated before AVOG started research on ED470 already in 1975. In 2004 we tried to convince the authorities that at the crash site the evidence could be found that it was ED470 indeed. It took time till 2012 before an excavation was carried out by the Dutch Air Force. Letters of relatives gave the last push for the officials to carry out a dig.

The Lancaster project was progressing rapidly in 2013. The Mayor of Bronckhorst set up various issue groups in January 2013. On behalf of AVOG the secretary took part in the joint consultation with all the other parties involved also in the Working Group on History and Education. (Educational School project WW II) The dig itself was planned for October 2013.

Eventually the remains have been excavated indeed in October 2013 and the evidence was found that it was ED470. Of course we all were glad to learn about that. Unfortunately no human remains were found so there couldn't be reburials. During the salvage operation some relatives of the missing crew from England and USA came along to attend the public days on 19th and 26th October 2013 and they were partly accompanied by us. Sure there was relief for the relatives to know their loved ones died at Zelhem and not into the river Waal/Rhine at Bommel/Huissen near Arnhem during that fatal evening of 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1944 and the crew in fact doesn't have the missing status no longer. (MIA)

The entire project itself was carried out prosperous and run flawlessly also the public days were a big success with approximately 4000 visitors. The end of the project however was very disappointing for AVOG.

Although the plenary meeting of 26 March 2013 agreed and documented in notes on paper that there "*had to be made clear agreements about the materials that should be found*" and in the plenary meeting of 16 April 2013 an agreement was established (also documented in notes on paper) that the local administration of Bronckhorst "*should be indicate a place for storage of the materials which will be found*" in practice the officials did act completely contrary to the appointments that were made before with all parties involved. Almost everyone assumed there would follow another meeting after termination the excavation project in which would be discussed and decided how the found materials (2500 Kg) would be divided and presented to in a responsible way.

The salvage project ended 28th October 2013 and immediately after that –within two days– most of the valuable and during the public days exhibited aircraft parts (apart from some collector items that were kept by the Salvage Service/Ministry of Defense) – went without further consultation with the other parties– straight to the local museum Smedekinck at Zelhem and the other a/c parts (± 2000 Kg) were –only decided by the Salvage Service of the Dutch Air Force and the local administration of Bronckhorst and the Mayor – immediately pointless destroyed (!) by a shredder contrary to the agreements that had been made.

There was a big dismay not only for us but also for the other parties that the authorities (municipality of Bronckhorst and the Salvage Service/Ministry of Defense) did not comply with the agreements that had been made. Because of this action AVOG was sidelined in an incomprehensible brute and rude way and unfortunately nothing remained to add to our collection and to hold available as valuable souvenirs for the relatives. On several occasions we had indicated that we were interested indeed in parts of this unique material. Our chairman f.i. clearly indicated to the chief of the Salvage Service/Ministry of Defense that AVOG was interested in parts that were found of the a/c during a private visit on 18th October 2013 –the same day as the Meachen relatives visited the site.

By this outrageous expiration the Board of our Foundation decided not to cooperate any longer with the municipality of Bronckhorst and with the Salvage Service of the Dutch Ministry of Defence.

Strange enough they never gave us an explanation for their behaviour.

Especially realizing the many decades of intensive research and efforts we did resulting to this excavation project we are left with a powerful feeling of discomfort.

*It's sad and simultaneously shocking to learn again that one can't trust the public authorities.*

Peter Monasso – Secretary AVOG Foundation