Chapter Thirteen

Fifty Years Later

Our big trip back to Holland was in May 1995 for the 50 year anniversary of the end of the war. We spent a very memorable month there.

Fig.13a Alf Thompson and I in the big 1995 parade at Apeldoorn in Holland

We will never again see a country showing their appreciation to another country as the Dutch people showed to us Canadians. One parade at Apeldoorn lasted over three hours. Attended by 200,000 Dutch people of all ages, young and old. There were more than sixteen thousand organised Canadian veterans, plus a hundred like myself that went over on our own, to celebrate with the Dutch people. Those that went over in organised groups were put up by the Dutch people, in their homes, in the cities and towns. Their hosts kept them, fed them, and got them to all the celebrations. Things were very well organised. Parking lots were organised in the fields, on each highway, a few miles before the town where the parade was going to be.

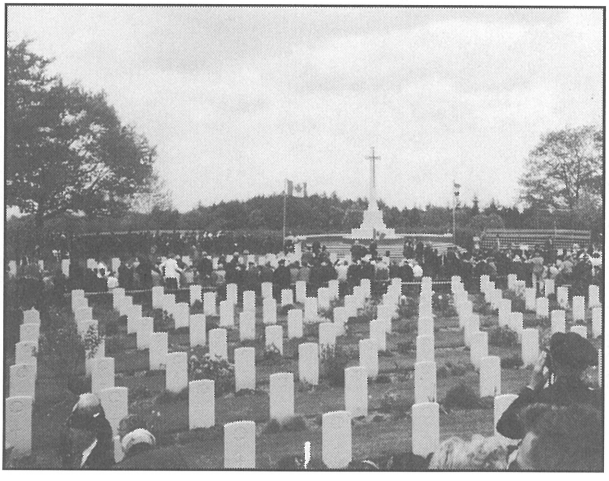

Fig.13b Parade at Groesbeek Cemetery

They had hundreds of buses taking us into the town. You would take note of the number of the bus

you got on and when it was over you looked for the bus with the right number and it would take you back to the parking place where you were picked up.

I don't know what would have happened if you forgot the number of yours! The Dutch have a organisation called "Keep Them Rolling." These volunteers each have a Canadian World War II truck, motorcycle, tank or some sort of war vehicle that they have restored. The vehicles had been either abandoned or sold by the army. They had 5,000 of these and used many of them in the parade to carry a lot of the older veterans, those who couldn't walk the two or three miles.

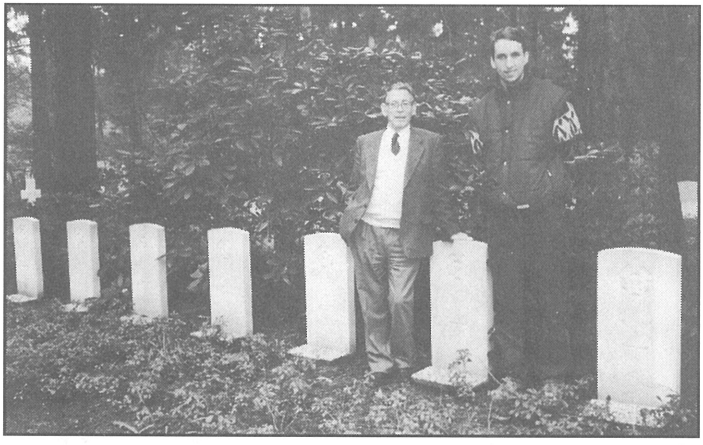

Fig.13c My Crew's Grave taken May 4 1995. Wybe Buising and I

Many started to walk and were picked up along the way. The weather was very warm at that time, which didn't help, and many of these army veterans were eighty years of age or over. We had a very large memorial service at Groesbeek Cemetery where thousands of Canadians are buried. There must have been more than a hundred buses of veterans. Volunteers served us free refreshments and food.

On May 4th, we were again at Amersfoort Cemetery where my crew are buried. It is a large cemetery where hundreds of soldiers and airmen are buried from several different countries. My crew is buried in a row and the graves are kept in beautiful condition. The cemetery is kept just like a park, mostly done by school children. On this day, every year, the school children put flowers on all the graves. It was very touching and moving.

Wybe Buising, a Dutch fellow who helped me with a lot of my research, had contacted the Warden of "Wolvenplein Prison" in Utrecht and talked him into giving me a tour. I had spent a number of weeks there with the Gestapo after I was captured. It is now run as an ordinary prison.

The Warden wasn't there the day I went, but his secretary gave me a full tour. I visited the cell where I had spent so much time and saw the black hole where I had been put in solitary, as well as the so-called exercise yard. I couldn't take pictures inside but took these of the yard and of what I saw out the window and from the outside. It wasn't a nice place, but it had been fixed up a lot since I was in there.

I spent a lot of time with Dicky and her family. You more than likely know, by this time, that I have a tremendous respect for her and owe her so very much. At eighty-six years old, she is still tall and very proud. If you offered to help her, she would just look down at you. She lives alone in her apartment, but her son Theo and her daughter-in- law Beth live close by and are very good to Dicky. Her grand-children Yvonne and Ronnie are also there for her. Dicky has two great-grandsons Ricks and Pascal. Dicky and I had some great drives around the country, to places we had been in and seen fifty years before. We did a lot of reminiscing.

Fig.13d Dicky, May 1997

Fig.13e Vonny, her Husband Hank and I, Fifty Years later

We re-lived so many things. We have something between us that very few people will ever have. W e visited my friend Vonny, just as good looking as she was fifty years ago! Her husband Hank had died a couple of years before. We had a good time talking about things that had happened fifty years ago. W e talked about the time when Hank was in hiding (he didn't want to go to forced labour in Germany.) A friend of theirs was getting married, so Hank dressed up as a girl and went to the wedding. On their way home a couple of German solders tried to pick them both up!

I also had some lunches to reminisce with Klaas and Ans van Middelkoop. They drove me around to many places re-living my life there: we stopped at the river where I crossed in the little boat, and had to help the German soldiers push the boat off the bank; we went around to the brickyard where I had been

captured and took pictures of it; we found the town where I was first interrogated. We drove around and saw many memorials to the war. Klaas showed me the house where he went into hiding when the Germans came after him. He only had time to take a few personal things and just had to disappear. He took a new name, lived in a new town, had a new identity but no job. They had to finish the last six months of the war this way. I met some great people in my seven months in Holland and these are two at the top of my list.

Fig.13f Klaas, Ans, Kees and I. Fifty Years later. Kees was a baby when I was there

They are now retired and Klaas spends his time with ex-underground people that need help. I had lunch with Eep Bos (The Teacher) and his lady friend. He was the one that first interrogated me fifty years ago.

Fig.13g Theo and his wife Beth, Dicky and my wife Fran-Clemence

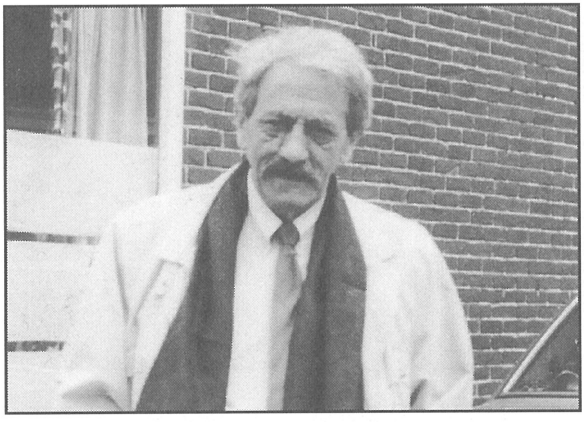

Fig.13h Eep Bos fifty years later.

I wore his clothes and he wore my uniform, that he had dyed. It was a great re-union! Unfortunately, he was sick for a couple of weeks and sadly missed most of the celebrations. I met Nellie and her father Mr. Cornelissen. He is ninety-six and in great shape! He

lives in a little house at the back of Nellie and her husband's home. I just hope I am in as good shape at that age. What great people came out of the Underground!

I lost track of the Heitingas until this year. Thanks to the internet containing all the telephone numbers in Canada and the USA, I found that their stepmother was living in Sooke, BC. John Heitinga had moved to Canada in 1950. He spent most of his life in Ontario as an artist and doing scenery art for the stages of the National Ballet and the Grand Stand Show for the Canadian National Exhibition.

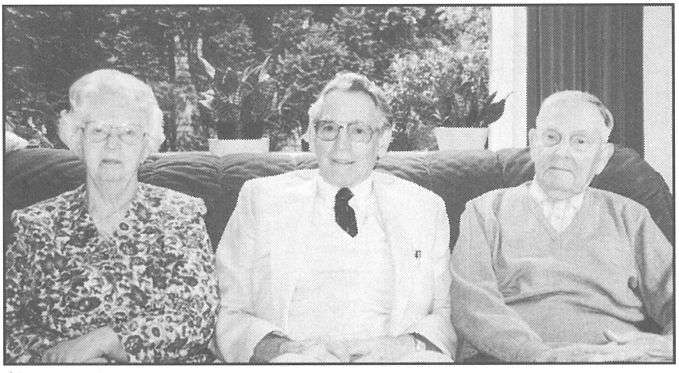

Fig.13i Nellie Cornelissen, myself and her father, ninety-six years old.

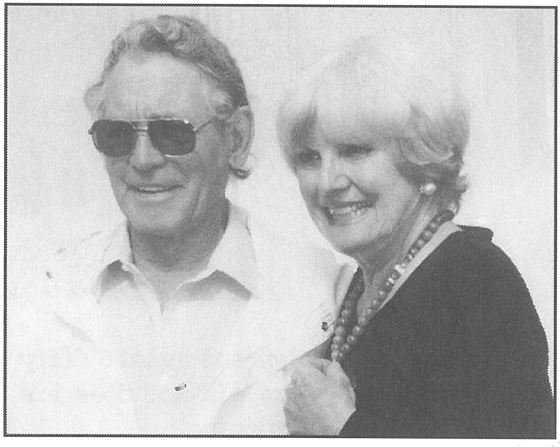

Fig.13j Shelah Heitinga and myself fifty years later

Fig.13k Eileen Heitinga and myself fifty years later

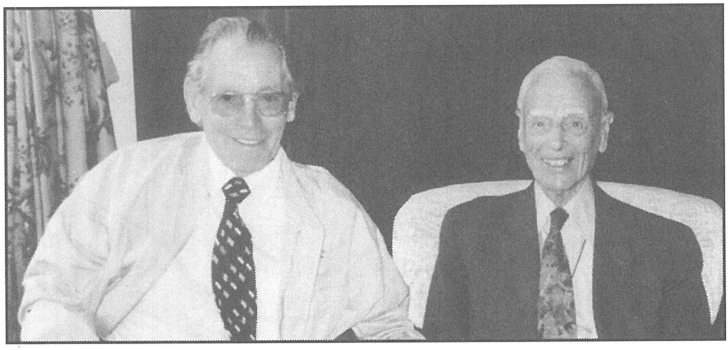

Fig. 131 Doc van Veelen and myself fifty years later. He is 90 years old and does his own gardening

I found Shelah and Eileen Heitinga, living in California and I got their phone numbers. Eileen is living in Hollywood. I visited them both this year, and we had a great day talking. Shelah is living in Newport Beach. I visited them both and had a good day of reminiscing. Shelah had the newspaper press with photographers and all. We had our picture on the full front page in color in the Newport Beach newspaper. The headlines read "Former WW2 Airman meets daughter of Dutch Resistance member after fifty years." That made me feel like a celebrity. Doctor van Veelen, our doctor in the Underground, is ninety years old. He has at least an acre of beautiful garden that he looks after by himself. His wife, about the same age, with help looks after the house. These are terrific people. He arranged the nurse for Roger Schjelderup and looked after him when he was really

sick. He also came around to visit me a couple of times.

I lost track of Jan Bakker but I believe he is now retired and living in Diemen in the Netherlands.

Fig.13m Louis Trainor died in Prince Edward Island. February 1997

Fig. 13n Wilf Berry 50 years later was looking good. He died July 1997 in Mission, BC

The CBC television show "The Valour and the Horror"

They talked about what the air force did in the war. This show was a very big insult to all of us who flew in WW II. My parting word is an article (Excerpted from Bill Gunston's Introduction to "So Many"). It says a lot more than I could ever write. This was reproduced in "Flarepath" a news- letter of The Bomber Harris Trust. This article is reproduced with the permission of Bill Gunston.

Without the bombers, what?

(Excerpted from Bill Gunston's Introduction to so Many)

On December 18, 1939, a formation of 24 Wellingtons was intercepted by fighters off the German coast; ten were quickly shot down, and only three returned unscathed. This at last convinced the Air Staff that not even a well-disciplined formation of modern bombers could survive in daylight. But switching to night operations was a daunting prospect, because it had not been planned for. The Butt Report, of August 1941, concluded that, on average, one-third of all crews failed to get anywhere near the target.

On February 22, 1942, Air Marshal Sir Arthur Harris was appointed C-in-C of Bomber Command. Morale began to improve at once. When he took over, the twin-engine "heavies" were already being replaced by the bigger Stirling, Halifax and Lancaster. Equally important, the Telecommunications Research Establishment was at last developing electronic aids which would enable crews to find their targets.

First came Gee, which covered north-west Europe with an invisible lattice of intersecting signals sent from three stations in south-east England...then, in December 1942, the most precise aid of all, Oboe. Again relying on signals from Brit-

ain, out to a radius of some 400 km (250 miles), this could guide aircraft with an accuracy of some 100 meters.

In January 1943 bombers began using H_2S. It was heavy, disrupted bomber production, made it impossible to fit the turret or even a window to defend against a night fighter underneath, and behaved like a lighthouse broadcasting the bomber's position to those same night fighters. It was also extremely difficult to use, but it had the advantage that it could not be jammed by the enemy, went wherever the bomber went and, in the hands of a skilled operator, enabled bombs or target indicators to be dropped accurately even over unbroken mist or cloud.

The Pathfinder Force (PFF) began operating from August 1942. Their marking, by Lancasters using H2S and Mosquitoes with Oboe, absolutely transformed Bomber Command's operations. As the striking power of the force grew, so did Harris' leadership not only keep morale sky-high but he insisted on trying to get more aircraft over the target in the shortest time, and thus saturate the defences and allow more aircraft to return unscathed.

Bomber Command's attacks, initially a mere nuisance, became what Hitler's armaments minister, Albert Speer, called "the greatest battle that we lost.". On May 15, 1940, 93 bombers set out for the Krupp works at Essen. In a later assessment it was calculated that the proportion of bombs that actually hit the vast factories was 3 percent. In contrast, in a massive attack by 705 "heavies" on July 25, 1943, marked by Oboe-equipped Pathfinders, the proportion was assessed at 96 percent.

The camaraderie of the crew was crucial. Morale was sustained by the knowledge that one was part of the best crew in Bomber Command which almost everyone believed he was. Who were these air crew? In many squadrons anyone as old as 25 might be called grandpa, and have to serve as a father-confessor, or as CO pass on sad news to next of kin. Family background counted for nothing. Ability, and the ability to inspire confidence in others, counted for everything... Rare indeed was the crew who doubted the worth of one of their number. And not least of the remarkable factors is that the surviving crews, who became closely knit into a single instantly reacting unit; were made up of a mix of nationalities, ranks and family backgrounds.

In the 1930s nobody could have foreseen that soon Britain would be isolated off the shore of a German-held continent, nor that it would be possible for Bomber Command to lose more than 500 aircrew in a single night. The beleaguered wartime island could never have trained aircrew in anything remotely like the numbers needed, yet it is surely remarkable that this gigantic (Commonwealth Air Training) plan should by late 1944 have trained 131,553 aircrew in Canada, 23,262 in Australia, 16,857 in South Africa, 8235 in Rhodesia, 2,891 in New Zealand and over 13,000 (all pilots) in the USA. Most of this enormous output then came to Britain to be honed to operational standard.

Fifty Years Later

It may be difficult for people whose experience of flying has been in modern airliners or light aircraft to imagine the harshness of a wartime bomber. A Whitley pilot recalls "Rain used to come into the cockpit, and for three months my hands were frost-bitten." Everywhere was bare metal, with numerous sharp corners, and vital switches that were all too easy to brush against, especially when one's bulk was inflated by the multiple layers of clothing needed to keep out the freezing cold, plus a yellow " Mae West" around the upper body for flotation. A leather helmet covered the head, bulging with the vital earphones. Goggles were issued, but seldom needed. Except for the eyes, the face was covered by a carefully fitted mask which contained a microphone and supplied life-giving oxygen. For air-gunners, one of the layers of clothing would be electrically heated, plugged into the aircraft supply.

When it was all over, of the men who flew with Bomber Command at the start of the war, over 90 percent had been killed. Even those who became operational after D-Day, June 6, 1944, suffered almost 50 percent casualties. Many people, and certainly RAF fighter pilots, felt that Bomber Command should received a special campaign medal. It was possible for a man to complete a whole Tour normally "calculated at 30 operations to defended targets" and receive no decoration whatsoever apart from the medals automatically given to all aircrew who completed a single operation, such as the Aircrew Europe Star.

What is incontestable is that, over the past 50 years, the role of Bomber Command has been repeatedly analysed and questioned on moral grounds. One veteran recently said "At the end of the War, I was a hero; today I am a mass-murderer."...

It is difficult to write with dispassionate objectivity. Even if one sticks strictly to facts, today's media have shown how easily "facts" can be manipulated and distorted. Despite this, it is at least possible to give a flavour of how people thought 50 years ago.

By 1941 cities throughout Europe had been bombed by the Luftwaffe, and helpless refugees had been machine-gunned from the air. These missions were flown with the sole objective of terrorising the civilian population, and breaking any will to resist. In 1940-42 the Luftwaffe devastated London, Coventry, Southampton, Bristol, Plymouth, Sheffield, Liverpool, Cardiff, Glasgow and many other British cities. From April 1942 its raids on Britain were specifically redirected against cities distinguished by three stars in the Baedeker guidebook as being "of outstanding historic or artistic interest."

By 1941 the United Kingdom was isolated as the only part of Europe still holding out against Hitler. Ringed by U-boats and suffering heavy air attack, it had no means of hitting back except by Bomber Command.

Bomber Command's targets were selected by the War Cabinet, who were themselves influenced by the suggestions of the Ministry of Economic Warfare. The Commander-in-Chief, who from February 22, 1942 was Sir Arthur Harris, could not dictate

policy (though he could offer advice). His duty was to assign targets and units to carry out the orders given to him.

Nobody can reduce to tidy arithmetic the overall effect of the devastation of Germany, nor what might have been done had the same effort been applied to some other method of waging war (but what?). Common sense surely tells us that, without the sustained attacks on Hitler's war machine, D-Day could not have taken place in 1944, or that if it had, it might have been a costly failure. In any case, without Bomber Command, and the equally courageous daytime attacks by the US Army 8th Air Force, it is difficult to imagine what could have been a viable alternative.

Today few people have any idea of the tremendous role played by Bomber Command" in winning the war. How many know that, because it destroyed the majority of the huge barges Hitler expected would bring his armies to invade Britain "losing 718 aircrew in the process, compared with 497 by Fighter Command even if the Battle of Britain had been lost, a successful invasion would almost certainly have been impossible? Without any public adulation, Bomber Command then sank seven of Hitler's 15 major warships, annihilated his merchant fleet and destroyed or "contracepted" hundreds of his U-boats.

Hitler's production czar, Albert Speer, said "The bombing of Germany deprived the German forces of 75 percent of their heavy anti-tank-guns, scattered all over Germany because we never knew where the bombers would strike next. Field Marshal Milch had 900,000 fit soldiers manning those guns. In addition, hundreds of thousands of expert tradesmen could not be called up into the Army because their skills were needed to repair bomb damage." Dr. Horst Borg, Chief Historian in the Military History Office in Freiburg, notes that "the aluminium in the fuzes of the flak shells would have built 40,000 additional fighter aircraft."

Nobody can say how many British lives were saved by the attack on the rocket laboratory at Peenemünde, and on the flying-bomb transport network and launch sites, but it must be many thousands. When the Allied armies were well established in France after D-Day Field Marshal Rommel said "Stop the bombers or we can't win!" Nobody can say how many British soldiers were saved by bombing Le Havre; the city was taken, giving the Allies their first Channel port at the cost of 30 British troops, whilst rounding up 11,000 demoralised Germans. Bombers stopped Sepp Dietrich's armour in the Ardennes (the Battle of the Bulge) by cutting all his supply routes; Gen. Dietrich later said " Not even the best troops in the world can stand up to this heavy bombing."

Repeatedly, whenever the Allied armies were held up by stubborn resistance, Bomber Command was always on call to eliminate the opposition. Their culminating achievement in such operations was to allow the British Army to cross the Rhine at Wesel with just 36 casualties, instead of the thousands which had been expected.

Yet, once it was clear that victory was in sight, the decision was taken apparently at the highest level in the British Government to distance itself from the strategic bombing campaign carried out by Harris under its own Ministers' orders. It seems that, with hindsight, the politicians saw that Bomber Command's destruction of Germany might later prove to be an embarrassment, and that therefore it would be convenient for its collective bravery, dedication and sacrifice to be unrecognised and unrewarded.

Today's media naturally reflect the change in public opinion, but that does not excuse a rewriting of history. This has caused distress to those who actually made it, and in 1992 the problem became particularly acute in Canada. Canada's contribution to Bomber Command had been enormous, in training aircrew, in providing aircrew, and in building Hampdens, Lancasters and Mosquitoes. Canadians have the right to feel proud of the giant role their country played in winning the War, but now, as one veteran put it, "We are made to appear as moronic mass-murderers and nut cases."

Canadian veterans were so incensed by what they saw as a gross and deliberate misrepresentation of their war role that they resorted to legal action in an attempt to restore at least a vestige of truth. Hurtful though all this has been to those who suffered and survived, they find it a comfort to see that those who choose to hold opinions contrary to true history are nevertheless free to broadcast those opinions.

They are able to do this because 55,573 men of Bomber Command gave their lives in order that future generations should not be slaves under the Swastika but should enjoy such freedom. We owe it to them to preserve a record of what they really did, what they really thought and felt, and what kind of people they really were.

About the Author

I was discharged from the Airforce as a pilot Officer in September 1946. After I spent a few months in Shaughnessy Hospital (A Military Hospital. in Vancouver.) When I got out I had a big problem settling down. I did various things . I eventually apprenticed for a plumber and I ran my own plumbing business until the late 60s. Later I went into building and developing in and around BC and for a while in Montreal. I was successful in business and enjoyed it very much.

My son Les was born in 1945 and is now living in California. He married Carol-Lyn Covey. They have a daughter Tamiko, currently living in Boston, with her own daughter (my great-grand-daughter) Kamori. Les and Carol also have a son Michael who lives in California.

My daughter was born in 1951 is married to Bob Carver. They have a son Adam.

My wife Ginger died in August 1991 after a long illness.

I lived in Surrey for 25 years where I did Scouting for 17 years. I moved to Vancouver for a few years and then to Coquitlam. Now I live in Metro town in Burnaby, a half a mile from where I was born. In 1992, I married France-Clemence St.Amand. I retired in 1995. I always worked for myself and did my own thing. I have spent a lot of time on my computer and have spent the last three or four years writing and researching my book, "The Long Return!"

Comments from Readers

Just a note to congratulate you on your accomplishment in publishing your book. Your story is one of great bravery and speaks first hand of the enormous sacrifices made by young men like you fighting for the Allies in World War 11. It is one of the few accounts of the Dutch Underground who deserve praise and recognition for endangering their lives and those of their children on a daily basis to rescue Allied soldiers. Had you not experienced this, I would have thought such a story impossible! It is hard to imagine going through what you did without losing your spirit. You have immortalised your experience and I wish you great success in telling your tale to thousands more. Your upbeat, sunny personality colours the whole book and was no doubt a contributing factor in your survival.

Fiona Brodie (Investment Executive)

My daughter and I read your book and we loved it. What an incredible journey for you and a journey of faith for your Mother and Ginger! I am just amazed. Your book should be mandatory reading for all students in school. I had to write a brief description of my heroes, so I wrote down the name of your book. Everyone who has read my brief has asked about the book. My daughter unfortunately, has decided if you can go to war then she can go to Europe by herself. I said it was not quite the same.

Laura Kennedy

"THE LONG RETURN"

I read the whole book and the rest of the family is reading it now, ***Very, Very,*** *interesting. During the war we lived a few miles from Hilversum. I think it was time somebody wrote a book like yours. I hate to see movies about the war and the resistance with all the cruel details. It hurts too much because it was all around us. I am grateful for your book and your pictures are great*

Nora Hall.

I just finished reading your "Long Return!" I must congratulate you for publishing this wonderful book. It was most interesting. I read it from cover to cover. I was a Bomb Aimer in the R.C.A.F. I would highly recommend your book to anyone interested in reading about the "Good Old Days." If you find the time to publish another book of such high quality, I would be most anxious to obtain a copy and read it. I wish you much success and high and really hope to have the opportunity to meet you one day.

Irwin Helner

I was looking forward to reading your book and now I am very grateful to you. For me it is a monumental memory, well-written and clearly printed. The war as seen by your eyes reminds me of the war as it was for me. These memories never die. I think for people like us the war ends not before we die. A positive thing is it brought us good and ever lasting friendship.

Eep Bos (The man who interrogated me)

Fifty Years Later

Thank you very much for your very interesting book about your experience during the war. I was again very proud by reading the name of my dear husband in bold letters on page 5. I read the whole story once more about the meeting of you and my husband Frits in the woods in Zeist, and I remember that Frits often told the story of how you asked him in very broken Dutch "Kun jy my verbergen?" In English: Can you hide me?

Anna van de Haar
(The wife of the man that picked me up)

Really amazing story! I related our meeting to a couple of people, because I was so impressed by what you did in terms of publishing all your own material. Your book is successful and highly unique. You must be close to 70 (I am close to 75) and I think you are amazing.

John Hoover (Business Coach)

Just finished your book. I must say that it is one great real life story. A work to be proud of. ***Toby***

The book is great! I am really enjoying it. I had to wait until my 15 year old finished it. Sure did open his eyes! Thanks a lot ***Brian Proulx***

Your book brought back many memories, many of which I thought I had forgotten. It made me think of the millions of people that were scared for life in every sense of

the word. The many forgotten heroes that were never recognized and just pushed aside by louder voices. Your book does justice to a lot of them that choose not to speak for themselves. We at the Dutch community are grateful. ***Hank Traa***

Needless to say, your book was a real pleasure to read and it filled me with great admiration for you. Some of your descriptions are very poignant and in general my understanding of life for all RCAF members of Aircrew has been enriched. What you wrote about some of the workings in the Dutch Underground and about Roger were of special and personal interest.

Mia Robson (Roger's sister)

Received your book yesterday and got my nose buried at once and just finished it mid afternoon today. That was quite an experience to survive. I guess your number hadn't came up. Just think of all those Dutch folks that helped you. They and their families would have been shot or to say the least tortured severely if caught. They certainly are a wonderful breed of people.

John Simpson

My wife and I have read your book. We were astonished about what happened to you during those days. I'll tell your story to the children and the people in the future. This book is very precious to me and later I'll give it to my son. Your story must be kept alive.

Kees Blankenstyn
(Caretaker of the cemetery)