

Chapter Three

June Sixteenth to Rakers

The most important night of the war, for me, began on June 16, 1944. This was our ninth bombing trip over Germany and we were all feeling confident! All our trips so far had been a piece of cake. We had returned to base safely each time despite running into fighters and flak. Quite a few of my friends, however, had been shot down or were missing. We didn't know if they had been killed, made prisoner of war (POW) or were running on the loose. We were all so sure it would never happen to us. It was always going to be the other crew that got shot down, or as we would say, "get the chop".

Ten days had passed since D-Day. June 16 was rainy and very overcast. Our name was up on the squadron reports. We didn't know where we were going, but we figured we would just nip over and back. I was writing a letter to Ginger but never got it finished, thinking that I would finish it when I got back. Bill Gardiner wrote a letter to his wife (he always wrote her before we took off) and gave it to me to mail on my way up to headquarters, but I forgot to mail it. I never told him before we took off.

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As usual we didn't know where we were going. We wouldn't know until the briefing as the mission was always kept very secret. As they always said, "One never knew when the enemy was listening." We went to briefing and were told that, despite a poor weather forecast, we were going to Sterkrade, a synthetic oil refinery in the Ruhr. The Germans had this site very well protected and we were told to expect heavy flak. As there was a fighter squadron base very close by, we could also expect a lot of German interceptors. The oil refinery was a very important target. The oil was badly needed for their war effort and their main steel mills and manufacturing plants were all around this area.

The first briefing included everyone and covered all aspects of the mission where we were going and what to expect. We were then split up into our different groups, such as pilots, navigators, bomb aimers, gunners etc., when we got specific information according to our trade. We got our briefing material, bomb load, weather report, maps, escape kits, and pep talk. We were told to expect cloud cover.

We then had the special dinner that we always got, sort of a farewell dinner. Air crew always had their ham and eggs before a trip, the same as when they returned. That was a tradition, like the Navy with their shot of rum. Then we picked up our parachutes. The people who folded our parachutes always told us the same thing: "If it doesn't open, bring it back and we will give you another one!" Then

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we headed down to the dispersal site to our aircraft. We always went by truck because when we had our full flying gear on, including a parachute, you didn't want to walk too far.

Everyone was in good spirits, (because we were making our first trip to the Ruhr,) our bomb load was very special. We wrote silly things on the bombs with chalk and attached inflated condoms. Our Wireless Air Gunner of course was very embarrassed when the priest came around to give us a few words of encouragement as well as chocolate, gum and our wake-up pills. The rest of us, being very young, did not care.

Sometimes it was a very long night. We would start at noon, check the aircraft, have our briefing, have dinner, take off at dusk or 7 or 8 o'clock and back home at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning. Some members of our crew, like our navigator, Bill Gardiner, got air sickness pills. It was awful to see poor Gardy. He had a bucket next to him that he would vomit in, wipe his face off with his sleeve and keep on working. He was sick almost every time. A navigator was very busy keeping track of where we were. There would be hundreds of planes up there at the same time and we would want to keep right in the middle. If one strayed out of the group, a fighter would get you or the ground defences could get you in their searchlights and "bingo" you were gone. It was the testing of air sick pills on the air crew through the war, that made the "car sick" pill "Gravol" as we know it today. While awaiting take

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off, we passed some time by kibitzing with some of the other crews. Watching a farmer just over the fence working in the field as it was getting dusk, we all agreed we were better off flying than working in the field from morning to night. We got the signal to start our engines, to do the final tests, and get ready to taxi into our proper position. We were all organised and lined up at the end of the runway, each plane in its place ready for take off. We began to be a little tense, waiting to see the flashing green light telling us to take off because sometimes the trip would be scrubbed at the last minute, because of weather or something intelligence knew, but they never told us why.

We took off just before dark as it would take a couple of hours to get to our height and get over the coast. We had one 4,000 lb. and twelve 500 lb. bombs, considered to be a big bomb load at that time. Smithy always said: "Getting off the ground with a full load of bombs is a big part of the trip." There would be seven or eight bombers taking off from each squadron which were scattered all over Yorkshire. On this bombing raid there were 321 Lancaster and Halifax bombers and twelve Mosquitoes from No 1, No 4, No 6, and No 8 Bombing Group. We would all be making big circles and slowly heading for the coast. We would have the exact times to be in a certain place so we would be all together in a group. When there was a big group of us we would drop tin foil to fool their radar. It would be like one big blur on their screen and they

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would just shoot up in the sky hoping to hit something. All our crews were on their own, as it was very dark, so the navigators had to be very exact. There would be hundreds of us at different heights but we would often not see anyone except over the target when everything was lit up. Everything came to life over the target because of the searchlights, flak and fires.

The Germans had another device that would scare the hell out of us and put us on edge. They would send a balloon up in the air, and explode it making a lot of noise with bursting bright lights, and you wouldn't know where it was coming from or where it was going.

We did not expect too much fighter activity as another big raid, with 405 Lancasters and Halifaxes, was to attack German flying bomb launching sites in the Pas-de-Calais, earlier. We hoped the German fighters would all be going down there after them. It was quiet most of the way to our target, but then all hell broke loose and we started to get flak from everywhere. It was cloudy down below which gave us cloud cover, and flak was exploding all over the place. They were not kidding us when they said: "there will be lots of flak." It was coming from everywhere. Talk about a fireworks display! It would have been nice to see, if they were not so damn serious about hitting us. The gunners got some good practice in. We started dropping a lot of tin foil to confuse them and were on edge, watching for anything that may be coming at us, just like when

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you disturb a hornets nest. Suddenly we heard Sid, our tail gunner, very excited: "Have a Jerry fighter at one o'clock." We could hear the rattle of machine gun. Next, we heard Sid call out: "Cork-screw hard and fast". When you are corkscrewing you have to watch for other aircraft as we knew there were 321 of our own planes very close by. Smithy swung the aircraft hard, to the right and down, and then to the left and up. If you think the giant dipper is something you should try this. Unfortunately, I never did like the giant dipper. He repeated this three times and we lost the fighter.

On the final bomb run into the target, my job was to lay down in the front of the aircraft, checking over the bomb sight, and putting the final setting in. There were a lot of variants to enter, such as our speed, the height we were flying, our direction and speed and direction of the wind. I had to get the latest reading from the navigator and the exact speed from the pilot, all the while watching out for German fighter planes. We also had to watch out for our own planes both below us and above us. We didn't want to be hit by their bombs and didn't want to bomb any aircraft below us. The flak, bursting right in front of us, seemed to be a half a mile or so ahead of us and exploding at the same height that we were flying. I said to Smithy, "Did you see that?" he said, "Hell man, I am looking right at it."

When we got over the target, the flak was just below us, so it didn't present a danger to us. As we started on the bombing run, we knew there were lots

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of planes above us and below us. At this point we began to see some of them. It seemed funny how we could fly for hours and not see anyone until arriving right over the target. Then all the lights down below started flashing and the flak lit up the sky. With over three hundred bombers on this raid, there were a lot of bombers over one spot about the same time, all stacked up every thousand feet, all converging on the same target. As a result, we had to hope for the best that we wouldn't get hit by the flak or the fighters and, at the same time, watch for the planes above us dropping their bombs. This mission was one of the worst we had experienced.

The bombing this night didn't turn out very well. The whole target area was covered with a thin layer of clouds and the markers soon disappeared. So we had to bomb on the glow seen through the clouds. As we left the target, the bombs were exploding, the flak was everywhere, and the sky was lit up like the Fourth of July. Twenty bombers were shot down that night. We were glad to get away from the target area and head back home. When our bombs were dropped, the biggest part of the trip was over and we, as usual on the return leg, felt relieved. As we were heading home, however, we flew near the German night fighter beacon at Bocholt which the Germans used as their holding airdrome for their night fighters. We were hoping they had all left for where our other bombers were. Again, they were all over us. Sid was on the intercom, "Fighter on our tail, at six o'clock, cork-screw, cork-screw," and all our guns

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were blazing. Smithy could manipulate the plane a little faster now as we had dropped our bombs and the plane was a lot lighter. We had a fighter on our tail twice before we finally left the area.

After throwing off these fighters, things got quieter. We were away from the target, going across Holland, on our way home. I guess the fighters were chasing someone else instead of us. There was the odd bit of flak coming up, but they were only shooting into the air hoping to hit something as we had good cloud cover. Most of it seemed to be over. A couple of more legs (You go so far in one direction and then change course) and we would be across the channel and down to base. I could see the coast on the radar screen and started helping Gardy get a good fix on it as we had corkscrewed around so much we were not sure that we were on track. I took a couple of shots with the sextant on my favourite star Betelgeuse. (It was always my favourite because I could always find it. There are a lot of stars up there so you had best use one you can easily identify!)

All of a sudden, out of the blue, Bill Baran, the WAG called out "There is a fire in the fuselage." That was a surprise because we hadn't felt anything. I grabbed the fire extinguisher and headed for the centre of the plane, but it was too late. It was already a mass of flame. The oxygen lines must have been fuelling the fire and there was no way it could be put out. When I reported that it was too big to put out, Smithy called out on the intercom, "Abandon Aircraft. Abandon Aircraft!".

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It was surprising that we were all quite calm. The engineer headed to the nose of the plane to open the escape hatch we all had to use, (except for the gunners who could go out through their turrets.) I found my parachute and got it on (we were generally a little careless where we put them, really not expecting to have to use them). I went to the nose to get ready to jump. However, when the engineer opened the escape door, instead of pulling it in to the nose of the aircraft, he tried to push it out and the slipstream jammed the door and now it couldn't be moved. We had been taught a hundred times: "Pick up the door and bring it in the aircraft." By now, we were both struggling with the door. Bill our navigator, was pushing me, and the rest of the crew was pushing him, wondering what was the matter. It was very black and our intercom was not on. Meanwhile, the fire was getting worse and was all around us. We all started to get panicky. I had pulled off my oxygen mask when I went back to the fire and was now close to passing out with the lack of oxygen. The last thing I remember was the fire. Then there was a big bang. Everything blew. I guess the gas tanks exploded. I can remember being thrown all over the place, tossed from one side of the aircraft to the other and I really believed the end had come. I regretted that I never had time to say good-bye to my mother or Ginger. I was knocked unconscious or I might have just passed out with the lack of oxygen, as we were flying at 21,000 feet when the fire started.

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The usual procedure is to put oxygen masks on at 10,000 feet altitude.

I don't know what happened to Glen and Mike who were our tail and mid-upper gunners. I don't imagine they could hear us on the intercom as the intercom-wire to them was more than likely burned when the fire first started. I imagine Smithy was behind Bill Gardiner and Mike Baran behind him. I guess when the plane exploded, we all went sky high. I found out after the war that two of the crew never got out of the plane and were carbonised. The engineer who was flying with us was picked up by the Germans. The others had not even pulled the handle on their chutes; two were reduced to ashes in the plane and three were found dead on the ground.

I hadn't believed in miracles until I woke up and found myself free falling through the air, with no chute. I could see the aircraft burning in the distance, pieces falling all around me. I was all alone. I mean all alone. I felt on my chest for my parachute (we wore the RAF observer-type parachute that strapped on the chest pack) to pull the rip cord but it wasn't there. That gave me a horrible shock. Then, I could feel a bit of a pull, so I reached up above my head and found that the pack had been unhooked from my chest and had swung above my head. I had enough presence of mind to reach up and pull the rip cord to open it. I pulled the cord and slowed down with a very big jerk. I can't remember if I protected my privates or not! With parachutes, the straps come around through the top

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of your legs, and one's privates can get damaged very easily. There are certain parts of one's body a person has to look after. But all seemed to work out all right.

The night was black, raining like hell, and pieces of the aircraft were falling around me. I felt all alone in the world! I couldn't see anything except the aircraft burning in the distance. I didn't know how high I was but I knew I would not have had enough oxygen to come to until around ten thousand feet. So I must have been somewhere below ten thousand feet. I didn't know when I was going to hit the ground. I was always afraid of landing on a Church steeple. I must have seen that in a movie or somewhere. So many things were going through my mind. Was I going to be prisoner of war? Would I land in water? In a town? In the bush? On a roof? Or in the street? What sort of people would I meet? Could I get in touch with the Dutch Underground? I tried to keep my legs relaxed, in a crouched position, ready to land in or on whatever. The darkness and the rain were so very black!

I didn't have to wait long to find out. I figured that I must have been at a few thousand feet when I opened my parachute because I was suddenly falling through branches! My parachute got hung up in a tree and there I was swinging in the branches and the breeze. It was still pitch black and I couldn't see a thing. I couldn't even see the ground. I imagined that I was just a few feet from the ground. I could hear dogs barking for miles. I could also

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imagine the Germans chasing and looking for me with their dogs. Without thinking too much, I pulled myself up, using my parachute lines, to release the pressure. I then released my harness and bang!!! I went all the way down, not one or two feet as I had guessed, but ten or fifteen feet. It gave me quite a shock. I hurt my knee and shin, scratched the skin off my left arm, and my right shoulder was a little sprained and very sore. I hurt all over, either from the fire, from the plane exploding, or from the fall. But there I was, sitting on the ground, pinching myself to make sure I wasn't having a bad dream. Was I really in Holland all alone? I knew that some crews that crash-landed in England thought they were in enemy territory. One thing I was sure of was that I did not want to be a prisoner of war. I then had to get serious and do something.

It was so dark and wet I couldn't see my parachute above or I didn't think of it. I first took off my "Mae-West", the life vest that we wore all the time in case we landed in water. I tried to bury it with some personal things that I had in my pocket, things I didn't want the Germans to see, in case I got caught. I also had the letter that my navigator had written to his wife, which I was supposed to have mailed on our way to the Mess Hall. I tried to dig a hole but I ended up covering it only with moss, leaves and stuff. We were trained to do this so the Germans wouldn't know exactly where we landed. I didn't think about my parachute still flying in the tree, visible for miles. I did not have a gun with me as

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I never liked them. Also, I could not imagine myself with a little hand gun running into a bunch of Germans with machine guns. Then it would be good night for ever. We carried two escape packages: one with very concentrated food (milk chocolate, vitamins, pills to purify water, etc.); the other with maps of all the European countries that we were going to fly over (Germany, Belgium, France and Holland). They were printed on silk so it didn't matter if they got wet. There was also money for each country. I was lucky to have these with me as often we were not careful where we kept them when we were flying since we were not planning to get shot down. That was supposed to happen to the other fellows. I must have grabbed mine before the explosion. My first thought was to get far away from where I was and away from the crash site. I tore all the badges off my jacket hoping to look as inconspicuous as possible, then I started walking, guessing south by instinct. I had a small compass in my pocket and one of my buttons was a compass, but it was too dark to use them. I came to a big fence which I couldn't climb over. I was thinking that maybe I was in a military area or maybe there was one on the other side of the fence. It was very hard walking in heavy bush. I didn't see anything until I hit it. So I went the other way. I continued to hear dogs barking all around and I felt they were all looking for me. I walked for about an hour, becoming pretty wet and miserable.

Occasionally, I thought I heard someone talking, would stand still for a while, but then I wouldn't hear

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anything. I wondered if it might be one of my crew or someone looking for me. The dogs seemed to have gotten closer. I thought the Germans might have had dogs out for me so I climbed a tree and stayed there for quite a while. I found out later that I had landed very close to a large dog kennel.

I continued to walk south, figuring the Allied lines were somewhere in that direction, and hoping that someone would hide me or help me go south. Eventually, I came to a main road but didn't want to cross it. I walked up the side of it for a while until I saw an outline of a church and, deciding I was in a town, started heading the other way.

After walking for a while I decided it was too dangerous to continue to walk until day break. I knew there was a curfew and anyone walking at night would be picked up or shot. So I lay down under a tree and tried to rest. The rain was coming down pretty hard, however, and I found you can't rest very much with the rain falling on your face.

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Fig.3a For me "The war is over"

So I just sat! It was too dark to look at my maps so I checked through my pockets, again, to make sure there was nothing in them that would give the Germans any information if I was captured. The time went slowly but daylight finally came. As soon as it was light enough to see, I got out my maps to try to figure out where I was.

I knew we were near Utrecht before we crashed so I found it on the map. I believed I had a good knowledge of geography, but could not think what language was spoken in this part of Europe. From a foreign language phrase book we carried, I looked up Dutch and memorised, "I am English, can you hide me?" I decided to go south into France where our troops had landed. Although I did not realise the distance, I had my small compass and started on my

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way. My leg was sore, I felt like hell, but I knew I had to keep moving and try to get in touch with the Underground. We had been briefed on the Underground and given a few ideas of how to contact them. We were told to look for a young fellow on a lonely road and to make sure he was alone. If he was a German, or a German sympathiser, there was a 50/50 chance you could get away from him. Or we were to go to a small farm house without a telephone. With this in mind, I lay in the ditch by this small road until a fellow came along on a bicycle. I then motioned to him to come over and spoke to him in what I thought was good Dutch according to the piece of paper I had. He didn't seem to know that I was trying to say, "I am English and can you hide me?" I think he knew I was English but he seemed afraid to help me. He motioned me to go the other way as the Germans were up the way he was going. So I started to walk the other way.

I walked through bushes, and along the lanes and the trails for an hour or so. I saw a few German soldiers whose uniforms were much the same colour as mine. I had taken off my wings, Canadian badges and stripes, so I felt relatively safe. I decided to walk as if I was supposed to be there instead of sneaking around, thinking I might not be noticed so much. We didn't have much practice at this in England. Coming to a little farm house, I went to the back door and said, in what I thought was good Dutch, "I am English, can you hide me?" The occupants couldn't understand me, so I showed them on the

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paper what I was trying to say. They were old people however, and were afraid to help me. They gave me a piece of bread with something on it. It tasted horrible but I ate it because I knew I would need the energy. Before I had finished the bread, I moved away from the house, in case they called the Germans, and sat by a road again. I then saw some girls in uniforms going by. They looked young so I thought they might be school girls from some private school. Fortunately for me, I did not stop them. I found out later that they were German Army girls so I don't think they would have had much pity for me. I waited around for a while longer, sitting in the ditch, waiting for an opportunity to talk to someone. A while later, a young man on a bicycle came along. Because he had a leather briefcase on the carrier on the back of his bike, I thought maybe he was a student or a teacher so I took my chance. I called out and waved him over to me, as I was a little afraid to go out onto the road. He stopped and said something in Dutch. I didn't know what he said but I replied in my Dutch: "I am English, can you hide me?" He didn't have the least idea what I said as my pronunciation hadn't improved. I showed him my wings, said "RAF" and pointed to the sky. His face lit up and he asked me in perfect English, "Are you Tommy?" I said "yes." What a relief that he spoke English! He asked me some pointed questions.

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Fig.3b Frits the man that picked me up. Died Aug. 1987

Was I alone? Where did I crash? Where was my crew? I answered these and showed him everything, trying to prove that I was English.

The Dutch had to be very careful as the Gestapo and Secret State Police (Geheimdienst) also dressed in Allied uniforms, and then they tried to make contact with the Underground. If an Underground group was infiltrated, all members would be arrested and shot by the Germans.

So there we were. He wasn't that sure of me and I didn't know if he was sincere or just taking me to the Germans. But we took a chance on each other. He told me to sit on the back of his bicycle and we rode off down the road from the town of Zeist to Driebergen, along the Arnhemse Bovenweg. We soon came to a small corner store in this small village of the name of Driebergen, at 95 Loolaan (street). I was now getting a little nervous because I was still wearing my uniform which had a torn arm and was a little burnt. My face and hair were the same. I was really sweating it out. It was very hard to know if he was on my side or not, but I didn't have many other options.

When we arrived at the little corner store, he stopped at the curb and told me to wait there a minute. He left me holding his bicycle and went inside. Just as he left, two German soldiers came

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walking down the road. They looked at me, nodded; I nodded back and they kept on walking.



Fig.3c Mr. and Mrs. Bos' store that I was first taken to

But as I said before, the average German uniform was very similar to mine. If a couple of our privates saw a German in his uniform with everything cut off he might not have thought anything about it either. But standing there looking at his big red arm band with a big swastika on it I fully realised that I wasn't just dreaming, that I was not in the local theatre watching a movie. This was the real thing and I was in it! The fellow came out in a few minutes, said, "The coast is clear," and took me into the store.

I later found out that the fellow who picked me up was called "Frits" and was one of the important

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men in the Underground. Inside, I met Mr. and Mrs. Bos, the owners of the store. They asked me a few questions on different things. I had a few cigarettes so I gave them those along with a couple of pieces of chocolate in my pocket. The chocolate had melted and was a bit dirty, but they thought it was delicious. They had never seen chocolate since the Germans took over.

The Bos' family welcomed me without hesitation and did everything they could to make me comfortable. When they realised my left arm had been badly scratched, they became concerned and applied some first aid by pouring iodine on the arm. It caused quite a tingle, but of course only for a minute. Mrs. Bos had a tear in her eye and said to her son, "Such a young boy and his poor mother, how she must be worrying!"

We talked for a while and then had something to eat: a bowl of hot porridge and bread, not black but almost, and I had my first Dutch cigar which they claimed was nothing like peacetime. I believed them. After that I was taken upstairs to wash and change. I put on some dry civilian clothes and dry underwear. The fresh clothes really felt wonderful, even though they didn't fit. I was going to lay down for a while but three men arrived and began to ask me a lot more questions. One was the store owner's son, nicknamed "The Teacher" as he could speak English and actually was a teacher. He was the main interrogator and I learned later that his name was Eep Bos.

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Fig.3d The Bos' family who owned the store

He told me later all he could think of was how a young boy like me could survive in Holland, he is so young and cannot speak a word of Dutch. They wanted to know about England, how things were there and when I figured the war would be over. They asked my name, number and where I was from, and said a few insulting things in German.

They later told me that I would have surely reacted to the insults if I had been German. They also asked all kinds of questions on Canada, England, the war and what was going on in general so they could radio back to London to check on me. They were taking a big chance and wanted to be sure. They had secret radios and were in contact with

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intelligence in England, but there was no way intelligence would tell the RCAF or my family that they had heard about me. It was too dangerous for everybody and they had to be so careful. Most of them had wives and children and, if I had turned out to be an impostor, their house and the neighbourhood would have been burned down and their families shot. Worse still, the Germans might shoot at least ten of them for each person helped.

It seemed strange to watch the local people passing by the house. They dressed much as we dressed, except a few wore wooden shoes, mostly the farmers or poorer people who couldn't get leather shoes in times like this. My idea of Holland was all windmills, wooden shoes and the girls wearing large skirts. Well, that is what the Dutch people wear for tourist advertisements. The houses were a little smaller but otherwise much the same as ours.

About this time, my wife and mother got their first telegram that I was missing. The telegram was delivered to my mother's sister-in-law, and she came and told my mother. Later that afternoon, I joined the family for a dinner of mashed potatoes. Frits and Klaas and one of the other fellows who was there in the morning came back and I found out Klaas was a leader of the Underground of that area. He was known as "The Banker" as he lived in a three-story house and had a bank on the main floor. Eep (the teacher) was my main interrogator, as he spoke the best English. He interrogated me for a long time. They wanted to know more about the exact place

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where I landed. But I had walked in the dark and couldn't tell them very much. I think they would have felt better if they could have found the things that I had buried, but the only real thing I saw was the bush, the big wire fence and the church. They were out looking for my parachute but the Germans had got it first. The Germans knew I was around this general area. They told me it was not safe for me there and I would have to go to another place. My maps and a few things I didn't think I should take, were put in their attic with my name and Address. Eep's family thought I had been killed, so a couple years after the war my mother received this small parcel from Holland with these few things in it addressed to the family of R.E. Porter at the Address I had left them. My mother had moved over a year previously but the post office finally delivered the parcel to my mother. (I am afraid today it would never get delivered). It was very strange reading the letter they wrote, saying how sorry they were that I had not made it back. After they felt sure I was not an impostor, they decided to move me to another part of town to the home of the Banker. I couldn't go, however, until just before dark. Around 7 o'clock that night we left by bicycle for my new hiding place (this was quite a problem for some who were shot down and could not ride a bicycle.) Eep Bos was going to ride ahead by about the distance between two telephone poles and I was to ride behind acting naturally.

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We had a flat tire on the way over and had to stop at a friend of his and repair it. If anyone stopped me, I was to pretend to be deaf and dumb. If that didn't work and I was caught, my story was to be that I didn't know anyone, that I was alone, and no one was helping me. I was supposed to say that I had stolen the bicycle and the clothes. But all went well and we arrived at the two story plus attic building, with a bank on the main floor on Wilhelminastraat (name of the street before the war) just off Hoofdstraat, and now is #5 De Korte Dreef, the main road in the village.

There were a couple of people around, but Klaas told me to say nothing and walk behind him. Klaas' wife's parents were visiting, they lived close by.

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CLASS OF SERVICE SYMBOL	
Full-Rate Message	
Day Letter	DL
Night Message	NM
Night Letter	NL

If none of these three symbols appears after the check (number of words) this is a full-rate message. Clarification by character is indicated by the symbol appearing after the check.

0224 L 0411 B

CANADIAN NATIONAL TELEGRAM

W. M. ARMSTRONG, GENERAL MANAGER, TORONTO, ONT.

FORM 6122

Exclusive Connection with WESTERN UNION CABLES Cable Service to all the World Money Transferred by Telegraph

STANDARD TIME 844 JUN 19 AM 7 22

CN1 31 2 EXTRA 66=RCAF OTTAWA ONT JUNE 16 1129P 106 475 B. C1

C A PORTER REPORT DELIVERY=

3406 IMPERIAL ST NEW WESTMINSTER BC=

#9446 REGRET TO ADVISE THAT YOUR SON R ONE THREE THREE
 NOUGHT SEVEN FOUR SERGEANT ROBERT EDWARD PORTER IS
 REPORTED MISSING AFTER OPERATIONS OVERSEAS JUNE SEVENTEENTH
 STOP LETTER FOLLOWS=RCAF CASUALTIES OFFICER,

Fig. 3e Telegram sent to my mother

He took my arm and pushed me right past them. He didn't want the parents to know who I was. After, he told me they remarked, "One would think he was a prisoner or something." Fortunately, they never found out who I was because it would be very dangerous for them to know if I were discovered. We went right upstairs to a small room where Klaas introduced me to his wife Ans. My bedroom on the third floor had a "V" joint ceiling with a trap door and in the centre of the They could speak very little English, but they showed me about the house and made me understand that I would have to stay upstairs. ceiling which could not be seen as it was

June Sixteenth to Rakers

built right into the V joint. That was my hiding place if anything happened.

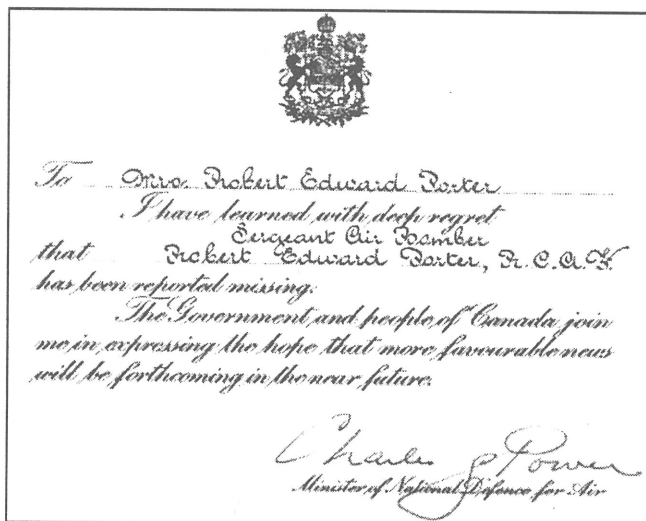


Fig.3f From the Minister of National Defense

A radio and earphones were also hidden in the hole and I used these to listen to the news. Buzzers in the rooms on the second and third floors provided warning signals; the button was downstairs in Klaas' office. One ring was for me to go upstairs and stay in my bedroom when a stranger entered; two rings meant danger! In the latter case, I was to run upstairs, get into the hole and hide.

These hiding places were very well built and thought out, containing one bottle of water to drink and another for relieving the bladder in case of an extended period of hiding. A few people had been caught by not having the second bottle. It was

"THE LONG RETURN"

necessary to have a good warning system to protect Klaas' son Kees. If the family was caught hiding me or helping an Allied airman they would all be shot. However, they were doing this for the freedom of the Netherlands, expecting neither reward nor recognition because no one knew what they were doing. The people in the Dutch Underground were the bravest people I have ever met! The family had quite a few English books and an English-Dutch dictionary. I sat and read (or tried to read.) The days were long as I had never been very good at being alone. They brought my meals up to me, but they ate downstairs, as their family was there and it was not safe for me to go down. At night, they would come up and talk or try to talk, but it is very hard when each of us only spoke a little of the other's language. Although Klaas could speak a little English. Eep would come around and talk. He put signs on the door, wall, lamp, book and everywhere in the room printed in Dutch and English to show what each one was. He tried hard to teach me Dutch but I found it very hard to get my tongue around the words. Ans couldn't very much, but we would sit and try to talk. It was a lot of work when you had to look up every word you said. We would try each night to learn Dutch but I found it very hard to learn as so much of the sound comes from way down in the throat. Sometimes Eep or Frits would come over in the evenings to talk with me and would teach me some words.

June Sixteenth to Rakers

IN REPLY PLEASE QUOTE
FILE NO. 419S/4-112



ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE OVERSEAS

NO. 419 (R.C.A.F.) Squadron,
"MOOSE SQUADRON"
22nd June, 1944.

Dear Mrs. Porter:

I deeply regret to inform you that your son, Sergeant Robert Edward Porter, is missing from operations on the night of 16/17th June, 1944. This was a very heavy attack on one of the main German industrial targets, and has since proved to have been very successful. Unfortunately, nothing has been heard of your son's aircraft since time of take-off and its loss can only be attributed to enemy action. There is still quite a possibility, however, that all or part of the crew may have escaped or, at worst, be prisoners of war, but news of this could not be expected for some considerable time.

Your son was with us for two months and during that time took part in eight of the recent attacks on Germany and German help territory. He was a very keen and enthusiastic Air Bomber and he set a very splendid example but took a leading part in the sports program of the Squadron during his off hours. I can assure you that the loss of this very popular and useful lad has been a sad blow to us.

If any further news comes hand, you may rest assured you will be notified immediately.

May I convey my sincere sympathy to you in your great loss and hope with you that better news may follow.

Yours sincerely,

W.P. Pleasance

(W.P. Pleasance DFC) Wing Commander,
Commanding 419 (R.C.A.F.) Squadron.

Mrs. C.A. Porter,
3406 Imperial St.,
New Westminster, B.C., Canada

Fig.3g June 22 (copy of letter) sympathy from my Squadron

"THE LONG RETURN"

ADDRESS REPLY TO:
THE SECRETARY
DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENSE FOR AIR,
OTTAWA, ONTARIO

OUR FILE R 133074 (R.O.4.)
REF. YOUR _____
DATED _____



ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE

A I R M A I L

OTTAWA, Canada, 23rd June, 1944.

Mr. C.A. Porter,
3406 Imperial Street,
New Westminster, B.C.

Dear Mr. Porter:

It is with deep regret that I must confirm our recent telegram informing you that your son, Sergeant Robert Porter, is reported missing on Active Service.

Advice has been received from the Royal Canadian Air Force Casualties Officer, Overseas that your son and the entire crew carry out bombing operations over Sterkrade, a suburb of Essen, Germany, on the night of June 16th and the early morning of June 17th, 1944.

The term "missing" is used only to indicate that his where about is not immediately known and does not necessarily mean that your son has been killed or wounded. He may have landed in enemy territory and might be a Prisoner of War. Esquires have been made through the international Red Cross Society and all other appropriate sources and I wish to assure you that any further information received will be communicated to you immediately.

Attached is a list of the members of the Royal Canadian Air Force who were in the crew of the aircraft together with the names and addresses of their next-of-in. Your son's name will not appear on the official casualty list for five weeks. You may, however, release closing the date, place or his unit.

Permit me to extend to you heartfelt sympathy during this period of uncertainty and I join with you and the members of your family in the hope that better news will be forthcoming in the near future.

Yours sincerely,

J.E. Todd s/o

R.C.A.F. Casualty Officer,
for Chief of the Air Staff.

R.C.A.F. G. 32B
500M--1-44(3778)
H>Q>885-G-32B

**Fig.3h June 23rd (copy of letter) from casualty
Officer**

June Sixteenth to Rakers

After dark, they would take me out in the back yard for a little exercise and fresh air, but we had to be very careful as there was a curfew at 10 o'clock. Time went very slowly. It was a little hard on the nerves wondering if the Germans would come and search the house. In Holland there were thousands of Jews, airmen like myself, and also young fellows who went into hiding to avoid being sent to labour camps in Germany.



Fig.3i Klaas and Ans van Middelkoop's home

The Dutch in hiding were called "Divers" and the Germans spent a lot of time looking for them. You also had to watch out for the NSBs (National Socialist Party), who were Dutch people sympathetic to the Germans. These collaborators were very cruel, many of them more dangerous than the Germans. All these people in hiding not only had to be hidden but also fed. They had no ration cards, so food had to be found for them.

"THE LONG RETURN"



Fig.3j Klaas, Ans, myself and their son Kees

They couldn't go out of the house or dare to be seen by the neighbors. If the Germans had any idea someone was hiding in the house they would make a search, mostly in the middle of the night. Every once in a while they would search every house in town but most of them had good hiding places. You would have to be careful if the Germans made a surprise raid at night. If you were in bed you would have to turn your mattress over before you went to your hiding place because they would feel if the bed was warm. The food here was good and I liked the place. Klaas and Ans were very nice people. However, after about 10 days, they said I would have to go and stay

June Sixteenth to Rakers

at another place. It seemed that the Underground had a secret telephone they used only in emergencies. They had used the phone, called Klaas' number and the Germans had found out. My next hiding place was kept secret, with not even Klaas and Ans being told where I was going; in case they were captured and tortured, they could not tell what they did not know.

Frits came the next day and he took me to a street corner and left me there. They did not know who was going to pick me up, and the person picking me up never knew who brought me. It was very well organised and had to be as safe as possible for everyone. A policeman in uniform soon came along, and turned out to be my contact. He was a big man, very calm, very quiet, but only spoke a couple of words of English (a policeman in uniform could be out at night as if he was on duty.) Again, all I was told was to walk naturally. The policeman introduced himself as "Rakers". If you didn't know their real name you couldn't tell anyone who they were. Everyone had a pseudonym or a alias. You very seldom knew their real name and only referred to them by their Underground name or just their first name. We walked down the street for a block or so. There were a couple of men in black uniforms who I found out later were NSB. When we got across from them, Rakers stopped, took out a package of smokes and offered me one. We lit up. He was very calm; I don't think I was. We walked on to where a car was waiting down the block, got in, and drove off. The

"THE LONG RETURN"

driver was "The Gardener," at least that's what Rakers referred to him as. I learned later that his name was Copyn and he talked with a bit of a Scottish accent. We drove about a half an hour to the city of Utrecht. With a policeman in the car I felt sort of safe. A couple of blocks from where I was going, we stopped, Rakers and I got out, and we walked to the house where I was to stay. It was one of a large row, like duplexes, except not just two but ten joined together called row houses. We went to one near the centre, whose occupant turned out to be an older lady by the name of Mrs. De Baai. I never found out if that was her real name, but she was English.

She was expecting me. She had two daughters, one a school teacher who spoke English well but the other one spoke very little English. It was a nice home and they were very nice people. They took me upstairs and showed me my room. It had a hole in the ceiling for hiding. It was a good, safe place. The hole was even big enough to put my bed clothes in. That night I had a bath that I will never forget. Mrs De Baai put the water in, brought out some bath salts and hair shampoo and before I could say anything she had put the bath salts in the water. I am sure they would have enjoyed them more then I did.

I had to stay upstairs most of the time, as we were on the main street where people could see right into the house from the street. The days were long again. I had lots of English books to read and jig saw

June Sixteenth to Rakers

puzzles to do, but doing nothing physical all day got tiresome. I had a ration of a package of tobacco a week (Rakers would give it to me) which I had to use carefully. I used to roll my butts and tried to cut my matches in half but found that didn't work. It was so hot in the evenings that I would go downstairs and the family would then pull the blinds or we would sit in the dark and talk. The oldest daughter was very interested in England and the rest of the world and what was going on. So much had gone on that they had never heard about, as they only received news the Germans wanted them to hear during approximately four years under the German occupation. Mrs De Baai's husband was a flyer with Royal Dutch Air Lines (KLM). He had been in Italy when the Germans invaded and they later heard from the Red Cross that he was in the Royal Air Force in England. "I got some relief by listening to the BBC news over a radio hidden in the cellar. Radios were only used for news." If anybody was caught with a radio, they were shot or sent to a concentration camp.

Food was not as plentiful here as at the last place. We were in the centre of the city and food rationing was very tight, especially with an extra person, like myself, who they had to share with. Your bread ration was put on your plate and you knew that was all there was. I didn't understand this at first because bread was something that always seemed to be plentiful in our life, both for the rich and for the poor. The family got their vegetables by going out to the country and buying vegetables. However, bread

“THE LONG RETURN”

and meat from the farmers were in very short supply. Once a week they got meat for the four of us. The week's ration was about the same size as a small steak but very tasty. There was also porridge which was a luxury because it was made with buttermilk. I couldn't talk them into using water with a little milk on top. Their coffee was made by boiling milk with a little very black coffee added. It was really ersatz, a poor imitation of the real drink, since little or no real coffee was available. It was another luxury item, but when I think back to those times, anything to eat was a luxury. Even electricity and gas were rationed, affecting all their cooking and heating. There was very little soap and what you did get wasn't like soap because it would not make a lather. So they washed their clothes in cold water with little or no soap and rubbed them on a board. Before the war, they had sent everything to the laundry but I guess if we think back to pre-wars days lots of people did not have washing machines.

One day, after I had been there for a week or so, I was sitting out in the back yard in the sun. The neighbor was a gossip and I guess she got to wondering who I was. She saw me there, stuck her head over the fence and started talking to me in Dutch. She caught me by surprise. I couldn't carry a conversation and didn't know what she was saying anyhow. So I just nodded a few times as she talked on then went into the house and I told Mrs. De Baai. They became concerned so they got in touch with Rakers. They didn't want to take a chance on leaving

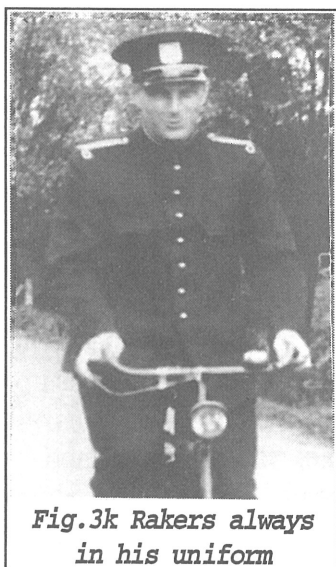
June Sixteenth to Rakers

me there, but I enjoyed it there and didn't like to leave. At the same time the next day I had to leave. Life was very fragile! I had time, I was starting to get anxious and wanted to get back to England as the war seemed to be going very slowly. The Allied armies were still fighting in France and the end of the war looked a long way off.

I heard from Rakers that there was a scheme to arrange for a number of evaders to meet near the Zuider Zee, where a British aircraft would pick us up. However, the plan never put into effect. This all seemed like a movie to me, where I imagined a group of us would be waiting by the sea with a plane coming in at dusk to pick us up, and these things were happening somewhere I guess. Many things were happening all around me, of which I did not always have a clear understanding, and I would sometimes pinch myself to make sure I wasn't dreaming. Rakers did not speak very much English, but I could generally follow what he was saying.

He was always so damn cool as he did his thing whether it was his police work or underground work. I was also told of another escape route down through Belgium and across France to Spain. However Rakers did not like this route because he had a feeling about it and never wanted me to go. After the war I found out he had good reason for his caution. Many people were caught going through Belgium, turned over to the Gestapo and put in camps. Many more were simply shot.

"THE LONG RETURN"



*Fig.3k Rakers always
in his uniform*

The next day, in his police uniform, Rakers came with an extra bicycle for me, telling the Baai's family that it was best if I moved to a safer house.

We rode off. I kept a safe distance behind him. I had a very strange and frightened feeling not knowing where I was going. I had to be very alert to keep far enough behind him for safety but not too far to lose him. If I did get separated, I would not know where I was or where I was going. He couldn't tell me what to do as he couldn't speak much English. We rode a few miles out of the city via the back roads, until we came to a small village called Groenekan, located on the road to Hilversum. Near the end of the village, we came to a house with a sign on it saying Police. Of course it was written in Dutch, but I guessed it was his place. His wife spoke some English so we could talk and understand each other. They told me that I had to stay here for a few hours as the American lady wasn't home, and they had not been able to get in touch with her about the change in plan. We had lunch and then supper as they still could not get in touch with the American lady. We slept there that night and the next

June Sixteenth to Rakers

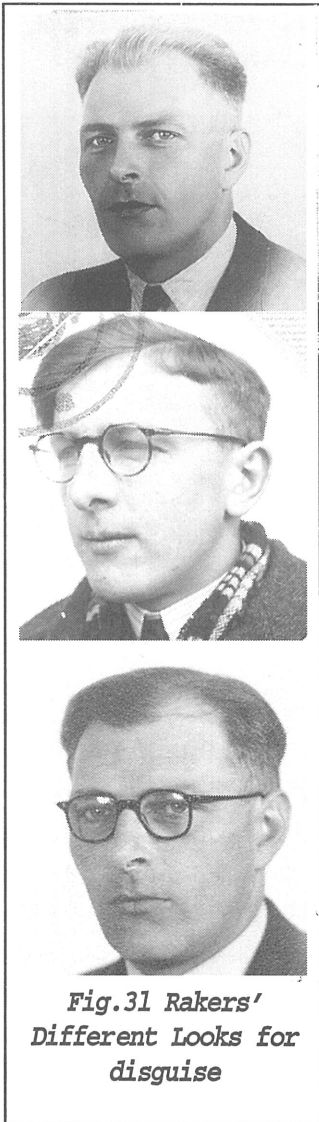
morning Rakers was told that it had been decided I would stay in his house with his wife and family.



Fig.3m Dicky (Mamma), Hans and Theo

I called his wife Mamma as both the children and her husband called her that. I didn't know what else to call her so the name stuck. Dicky (Mamma) was 32 years old and very happy-go-lucky. I do not think she liked the idea of me, a young Canadian flyer and married, going to stay with a American lady living alone. (I thought it was a good idea but I never had the choice.)

"THE LONG RETURN"



They had two young boys, Hans and Theo, who were four and five years old. I was again impressed by the risk they took in keeping me. "They told the boys that I was their Uncle from a province in north Holland called Groningen. The dialect spoken there is so different that it could not be understood in this part of the country. So the boys did not suspect I was an Allied evader. This was going to be my home and they made me feel right at home.

It was as safe here as any place. Who would expect a respectable Dutch policeman, an ex-army captain working for the Germans, to be hiding a Canadian flyer and later up to six Canadian soldiers in the house? He was a policeman and even more

he was the Commandant of the Dutch Underground in that area with responsibility for getting

June Sixteenth to Rakers

ration cards for Jewish people in hiding, Divers and people like myself. He frequently collected food from farmers and distributed it around. He helped to look after and feed almost two hundred people. He was also able to move people like myself because, being a policeman in uniform, he could travel and be out after curfew. He also had to serve as a policeman and was called out many times by the Germans. He was one of the bravest men I have ever met, and his wife, Dicky, was always right behind him.

After the war I found out that June the sixteenth the night I got shot down, was not a good night. There were 321 aircraft on the raid to Sterkrade /Holten: 162 Halifaxes, 147 Lancasters, 12 Mosquitoes. Approx. 21 bombers were shot down by night fighters and a further 10 by Flak.

"THE LONG RETURN"

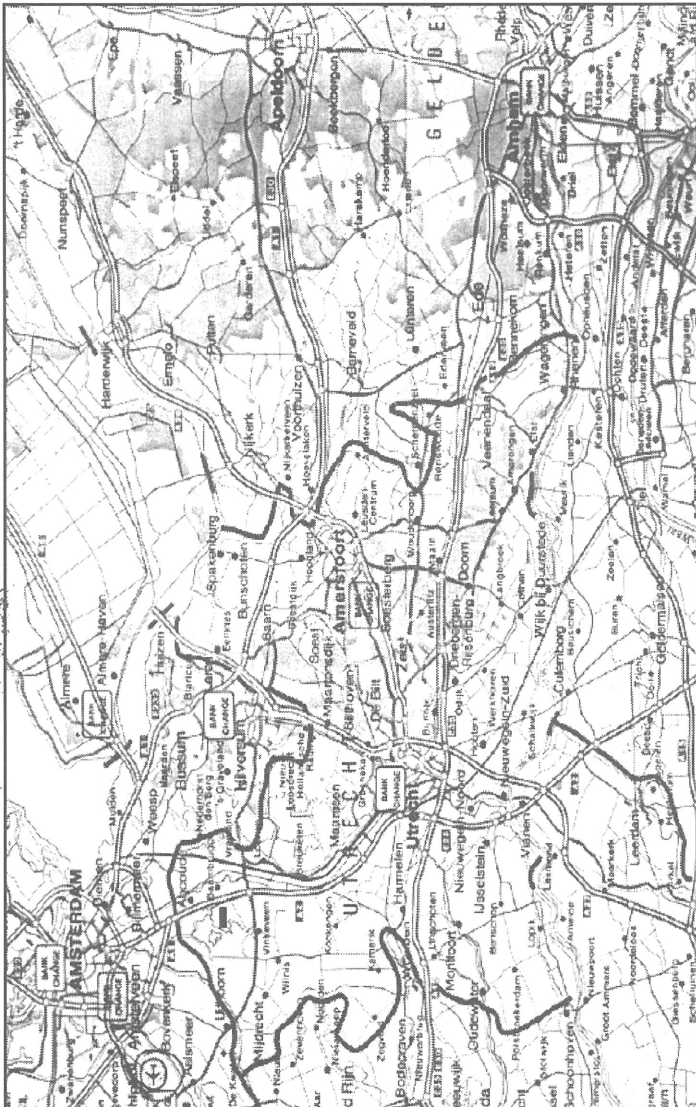


Fig.3n Map of Holland where I was

June Sixteenth to Rakers

CITY POLICE OF Zeist, No: 2158	Witness by The Mayor of Zeist, June 21 st , 1944
OFFICIAL - REPORT	
On June 17 th , 1944, at about 0210h, a report was received, that a burning plane crashed onto the Utrechtscheweg in Zeist. Simon Dam, Chief Sergeant of the City Police of Zeist and Special Constable, went as " Chief Crash Investigator" of the Lbd (Luchtbeschermings dienst, A.R.P.) on order of the Opperluitenant(Opper = general, kuitenant = lieutenant) of Police, Evert Herman Neppelenbroek, Local Chief of the Lbd, to the location, and found, a plane burning on the property Utrechtseweg 48, inhabited by Jhr. C.A.de Pester.	
The wreckage was located in an open space, about 50 m from the house, and for the most part, was totally burned. The fire was extinguished by the local fire-brigade.	
Upon investigation, we found that the crashed airplane was a four-engine English Bomber.	
Except for the bomber crew, no human or animal was killed or injured, and no damage was caused.	
I went to the location immediately upon being informed of this incident, and ordered the medical picket back as they were not needed.	
Later a report came in that bodies were found in two locations in the neighbourhood of the crash site, probably members of the crew. A report was able also received that, in the Torenlaan in Zeist one of the survivors was found.	
On order of the German authorities, the bodies were taken to the mortuary of the policy office in Zeist, while the arrested airman was taken immediately to the Ortskommandantur by the already mentioned Oberlt. Neppelenbroek.	
Later it became evident that another two airmen were found, in the wreckage of the airplane, but their bodies were not recovered.	
The airplane was guarded by a German military sentry. Two men of the airplane have still not been found.	
Reports were received throughout the morning of a part of the plane having fallen in the area. As far as possible, these were taken by motor transport to the German Authorities. Where the parts were to large or to awkward to transport, they were guarded by a policeman.	
All this has been done on orders of the Ortskommandant in Zeist. For A.R.P. purposes, 35 litres of petrol was used.	
The above was made on oath of office in Zeist and signed on June 18 th , 1944.	
Seen: The Captain of Police and Commandant of the Lbd.	

Fig.3o June 21st 1944. German Police report from Zeist (Translated to English)