

## How to close a historic circle from human point of view

The reappearance of P/O E.D. “Denis” Hincks, skipper of RAF Stirling V8 - U

### Introduction

The compiler - his remarks are written in purple - of this article belonged once to the privileged audience, living in one of the polders in the Western part of the province of Noord-Brabant, NL, to have watched the Air Armada, following the Northern Route, while executing the Market part in operation Market Garden. This is a combined military airlanding and ground attack plan, Holland, September 1944.

This operation was launched:

- after an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Hitler, “Der Führer of the Third Reich” - dictator of Nazi-Germany/suppressor of occupied European territories i.e. democratic countries -, to topple him and his Gang (July 1944).
- during frontal attacks on the eastern and western European front by the allies.
- in an attempt to isolate launching sites for V-1’s and very recently V-2’s, both pilot-less flying objects, directed on steering centre of the allies, London.

Alas, for two days only (the Northern Route was used on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> only, D and D+1, respectively), and in my opinion I did register, rule of the thumb, more than a thousand allied planes and hundreds of transport gliders per day. Mind you, the large majority passing over at a height which stimulated you to wave to crew and passengers, our Liberators. In a few cases you could observe reactions of appreciation by waist gunners from 8<sup>th</sup> USAAF B-24 “Liberators”, transferred to re-supply duties on D + 1 of this operation; flying home bound “on the deck” as a way to survive. And in a polder setting this means: very low; imprinted as “flying underneath the cows” (picture A). An experience in my life hardly surpassed thereafter.



*Picture A. B-24 “Liberators”, 2nd Air Division, 8th USAAF, on a re-supply mission flying low over “new” country at tree-top level.*

*Courtesy: archive “Workgroup Market Flights”, Groesbeek, Malden, Heesch, about 1980*

Step by step the broad outline of the execution of this air operation was disclosed to me after the war by various books, especially: *The Red Beret* (1) and *Airborne Operations in World War II* (2). But there was initially a paucity of information of details of the executors and especially those aircraft which made premature landings south of their assigned Landing/Drop Zones; especially in the Province of Noord-Brabant (NB), my “home-county”.

My research to disclose the whereabouts of those unfortunates ones, but gradually it appeared mostly lucky ones - from a human point of view -, started in the middle of the seventies of the 20th century.

It appeared quickly that an estimated 6000 planes, transport gliders excluded (3), landed involuntary within Dutch territory during those dark days covering almost five years.

I had to find out which crashes could be identified as having occurred during operation Market Garden, September 17 – 30 (the latter date was assessed by me arbitrarily). It was estimated at about 400, and again transport gliders excluded (3).

In the very beginning and very stimulatory I did get hold of a unique serial of pictures unveiling the type of plane, a Short Stirling Mk IV, made by a nearby living young professional photographer using a Hasselblad mirror camera. He did disclose for me the site, which he did visit by bicycle, of his temporary - hit and run - interest and the day these pictures had been made: Sunday, September 24, 1944.

Apparently he had dodged the registration codes of his object of that day, a real draw back of my starting research. He did sponsor my attempts, you may guess how, to unveil the whereabouts of his specific efforts.

Local witnesses and a relevant passage in an Operations Record Book (4) enabled me to settle the backgrounds of this crash out of the nine Stirling Mk IV's which crash-landed in my home county during this episode.

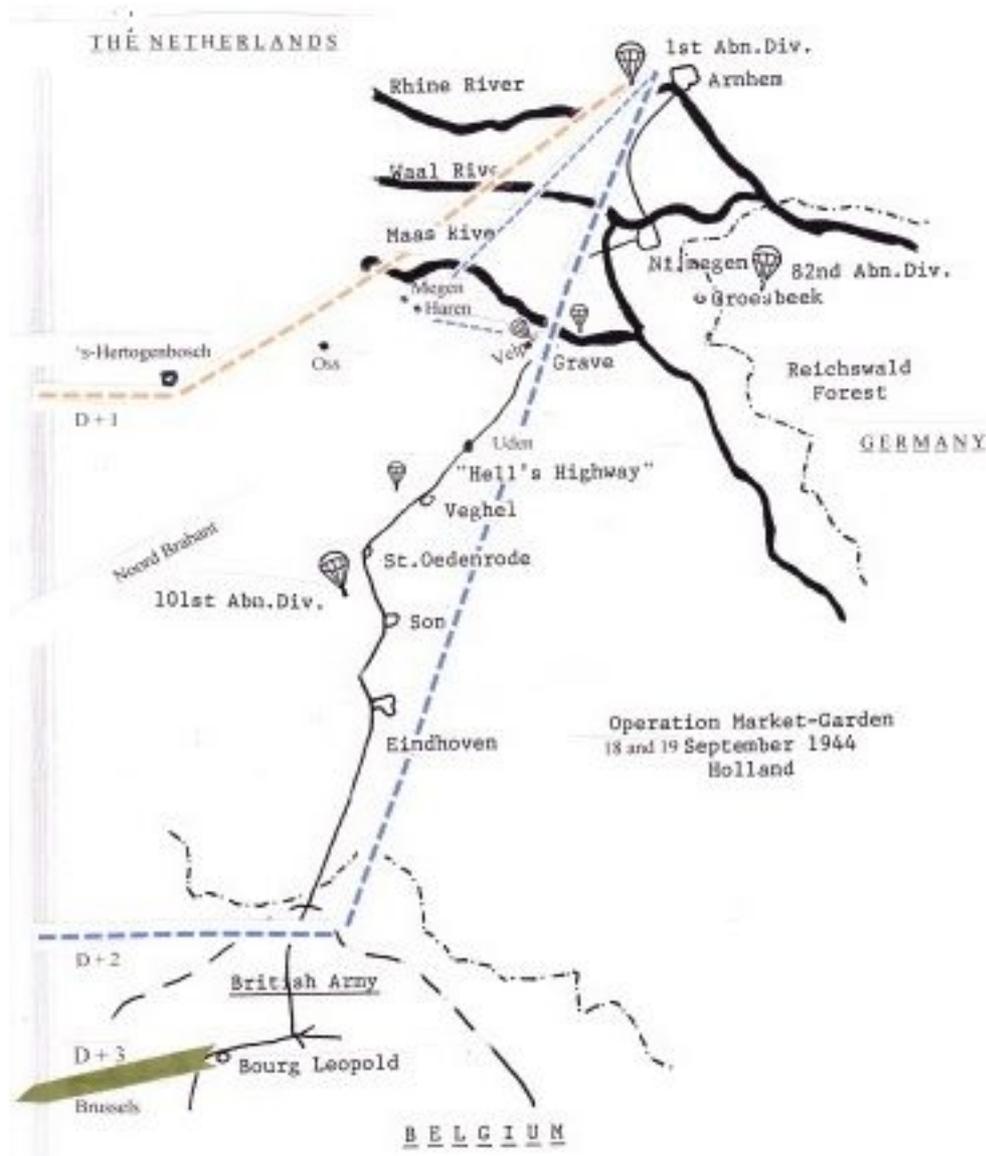


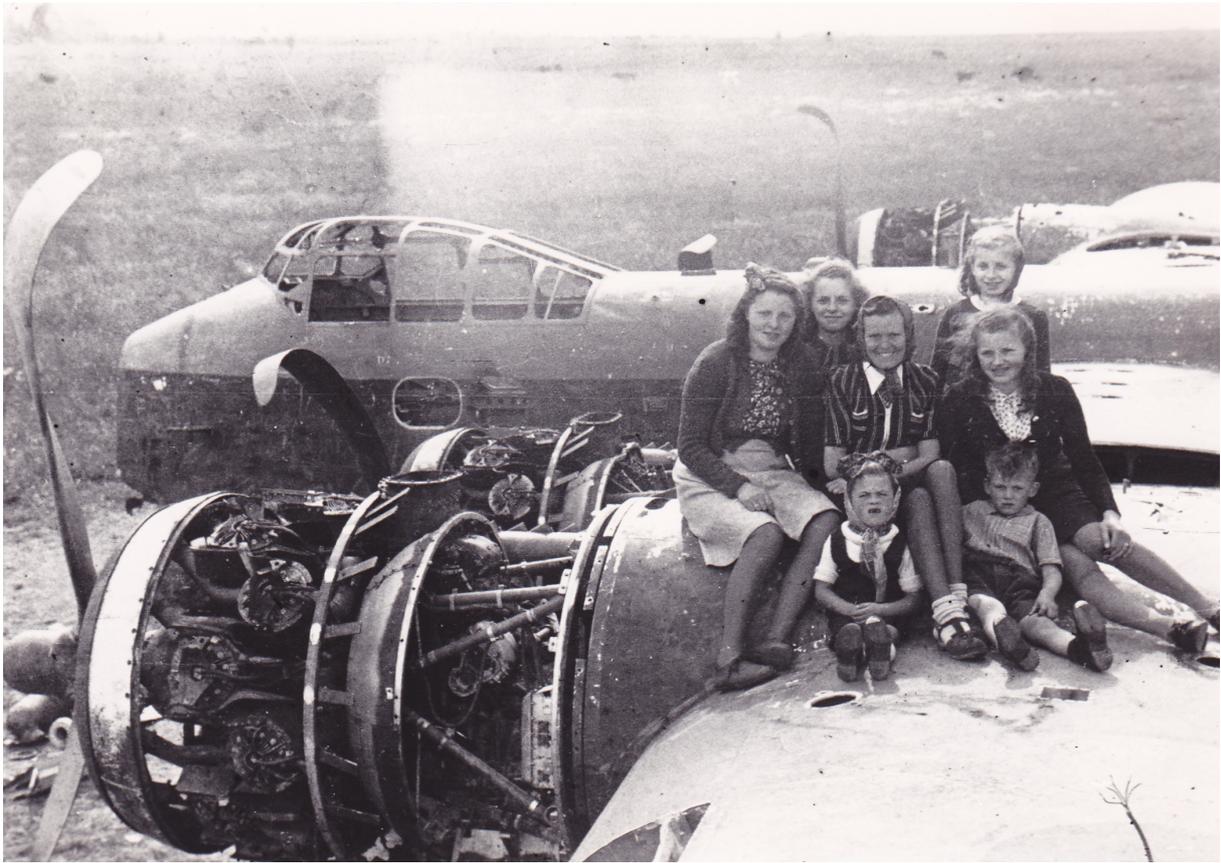
Figure 1. Survey of the most eastern part of the two missions of P/O D.E. Hincks and crew, and locations of relevant towns visited/passed by them during their contribution to operation Market Garden. The map was made by Joop Thuring, 2010.

It was a lady from the nearby town of Haren – at that time no-man’s land - who stated clearly “that the plane shown in these pictures arrived at her home town on Tuesday, September 19, 1944 in the early afternoon and the crew managed to escape behind friendly lines by assistance of local Dutch patriots, according to rumours”. Spontaneously she handed over to me other pictures of this plane (pictures B and C), made during the spring/summer of 1945 showing the effects of the various elements on this object in an unfamiliar but challenging polder scene along the river Maas. Moreover, she disclosed the address of the son in law of a patriotic family living nearby the crash site. The latter had welcomed once the abruptly arrived tiny liberation force.



*Picture B. The proof of the pudding, “V8 - U”. The roundel was most likely used as a target of opportunity by members of allied units/ground forces which did not return home before wintertime 1944/45 as once hoped for.*

*Photo: Mrs. Van Amstel – Klaazen; courtesy: Ms. J.G. de Kock, Haren/Oss, 1983*



*Picture C. The usual fate of a crash-landing. This “allied dinosaur” coded V8-U - which assisted once to re-settle democratic freedom, North-Western European Theatre - bit by bit dissected.*

*Photo: Mr. Daan Scholten; courtesy: Ms. J.G. de Kock, Haren/Oss, 1983*

About ten years ago the editors of a regional historical magazine offered me space to prepare an article to enable me to disclose the results of my research with respect to this plane.

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Picture D. Impression made by a young professional photographer from Oss, Mr. Leo van den Bergh. It was selected by the editors of a regional Hereditary magazine as illustration for the cover of the issue which did elucidate in an article the whereabouts of V8 - U starting from 19<sup>th</sup> of September 1944. It shows the office at the rear of F/Sgt R.E. Johnson, Air Gunner.

I did visit the above mentioned lady last year, September 2009, and you may bet... main topic of conversation: "V8-U". She did show me another hitherto to me unknown picture - not exciting on first sight - and explained to me the whereabouts.



*Picture E. Anxious young ladies on wooden shoes on their way to “taste” from the allied technical achievements which they have watched in the air so many times.*

*Photo: Mr. Daan Scholten; courtesy: Ms. J.G. de Kock, Haren/Oss, 2009*

In a split second it induced an idea: I could use it as a metaphor in an article, if I was able to get hold of new details especially when uttered by one or more of the to me unknown crew-members involved.

Such an opportunity did arise very recently when a daughter of the skipper of the plane, living in Australia, visited her niece living in Holland during springtime 2010. The latter had the guts to contact by E-mail the town-hall in Oosterbeek, a town near Arnhem and once one of the centres of the battle. Whether they knew and could assist to elucidate the interactions of a certain RAF pilot, “Hincks”, her uncle, with locals somewhere in Holland. An alert civil servant contacted Mr. Geert Maassen, former municipal archivist, and now working at the Gelders Archief in Arnhem. He quickly recognized the human background of this request and informed a motivated researcher, specialized in this subject and living nearby the hot spot, from socio-historic point of view.

A busy encouraging correspondence developed quickly with “Down Under”, supported by the wonders of the digital world.

The girls in picture E demonstrate for a keen observer an attitude of enthusiasm, that they could hardly wait to undergo fresh and exciting experiences by watching and inspecting an allied monster, with a unique history, which was resting on the fertile clay in their hamlet. And... in a peaceful atmosphere as democracy had been restored recently in their country.

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Now, feel yourself as the young ladies in this picture by reading the memoirs of the skipper involved of this hectic period in his life as told to his daughter Julie in the month of May of this year (2010), almost 66 years thereafter.

The skipper, P/O “Denis” Hincks (picture F), of Stirling V8-U, serial No. LJ 647, from 570 RAF Squadron, B-Flight, operating from Harwell, 38 RAF Transport Group, spoke about his experiences during this operation, and subsequently they were typed-out this nearby living daughter. This is herewith enclosed in a “black outfit”.



*Picture F. “Denis” Hincks, photographed around 2000 A.D..*

*Courtesy: Mrs. Roudil - van Hartley, 2010*

N.B. It is with sorrow that I have to announce that Mr. E.D. Hincks, the skipper, died after a few months of illness, “Down Under”, when his contribution was in the final stage for world wide publication. He did led me know recently; “do what you like to do”.

His daughters did copy for me a relevant page out of his pilot’s logbook. This arrived in an analogue form at my desk a few days after Denis had arrived at his ultimate eternal destination. You can translate that as a message from another world. Fortunately it could be included.

YEAR		AIRCRAFT		PILOT, OR 1ST PILOT	2ND PILOT, PUPIL OR PASSENGER	DUTY (INCLUDING RESULTS AND REMARKS)
MONTH	DATE	Type	No.			
1944				TOTALS BROUGHT FORWARD		
SEPT	3	STIRLING	LT647	SELF	CREW	AIR TEST
SEPT	11	STIRLING	LT647	SELF	CREW	24th Army SAs. ROANNE: OPS. Butler & Jinks
SEPT	14	STIRLING	EE306	SELF	CREW	AIR TEST
SEPT	16	STIRLING	LT647	SELF	CREW	AIR TEST
SEPT	18	STIRLING	LT647	SELF	CREW	OPERATION "MARKET" HOLLAND
SEPT	19	STIRLING	LT647	SELF	CREW	OPERATION "MARKET" CRASH- LANDED IN HOLLAND.
SEPT	22	DAKOTA	KG587	F/PT ALFORD	SELF	RETURN FROM BRUSSELS.
				SUMMARY FOR SEPTEMBER 19 44		1. ....
				UNIT ... 570 SQUADRON AIRCRAFT		2. STIRLING
				DATE ... 1 10 44		TYPES. 3. DAKOTA
				SIGNATURE: <i>ED Hincks</i>		4. ....
I. Stewart S/L						
OFFICER COMMANDING B FLIGHT						
No. 570 SQUADRON R.A.F.						
OCT	3	STIRLING	LT667	SELF	CREW	AIR TEST
OCT	7	STIRLING	LT667	SELF	CREW	TO RIVENHALL GLIDER TOWING
OCT	10	STIRLING	LT667	SELF	CREW	HARWELL & RETURN
OCT	15	STIRLING	LT890	w/o PARKER	SELF	TO HARWELL
OCT	15	STIRLING	LT667	SELF	CREW	FROM HARWELL GLIDER TOW
OCT	15	STIRLING	LT854	F/PT BULLEN	SELF	TO HARWELL
				GRAND TOTAL [Cols. (1) to (10)]		TOTALS CARRIED FORWARD
				535 Hrs. 31 Mins.		

Figure 2. Page from the pilot's logbook, including the crash landing.

Occasionally I have slightly shortened the text for practical reasons related to the audience selected and added details to his observations which I came across during my research about this subject covering some decades.

Mr. Joop Thuring, Heesch, NL; September 17, 2010, "66 years thereafter".

**Narrative by one of the allied crew members**

Dear Joop

Finally here it is. I finished it this evening (May 23, 2010).

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*Happy reading! Dad sends his best wishes to you.*

*Kind regards  
Julie*

“Hello Barn door, this is Victor Eight Uncle, do you read? Over” (picture G)

That was my original call sign.



*Picture G. A part of the crew involved parallel to the characteristic port main wheel of their aircraft. L/R: Pilot: E.D. Hincks, unknown Bomb Aimer replacing H. Fletcher (“had been shot and injured so he was unable to fly”), Wireless Operator: J.P. Smith, Flight Engineer: C.E. Baker, Navigator: R.L. Huckfield. The picture was taken at Rivenhall Airfield, Essex, 1945.*

*Courtesy: E.D. Hincks’ family, Australia, 2010*

Hello Joop, thank you for your interest in Arnhem. In return I will try and recollect some of the things that happened to my crew, and me.

The main thing that happened, of course, was my being shot down. But on the previous day, or may be it was two days - it was two days - I had to pull a glider which had about thirty troops, complete with their guns and their sacks and everything else. We had to pull in and drop them just north of Arnhem. We used to fly in pairs, so you would get two Stirling bombers pulling two gliders. We were about 1000 feet high, that was all, because there was no need to go higher. We got about three quarters of the way there, we were over Holland, I don’t know where. We were on the way to Arnhem. Looking at the plane I was following, I noticed that there was smoke coming out the back of the tail.

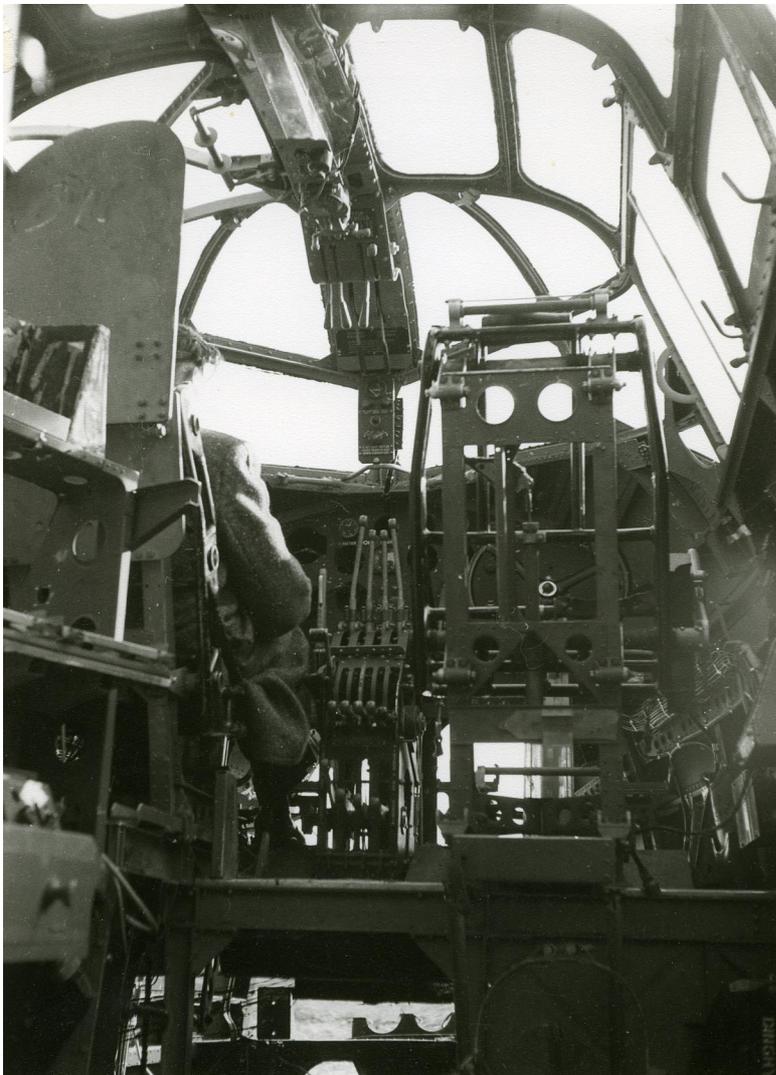
The black smoke is usually bad, something is burning. It just got worse and worse and worse, and then the glider that was being pulled, disconnected, and started to go down. Then there were flames coming out of the Stirling, and it gradually went into a dive, very, very gradually, it went down and down, until it was almost pointing vertically towards the ground. Well, it didn't take long to get down there. There was one person who got out. I remember this because we were all watching, and we had to count how many people get out to see if anyone had a possibility of living anyway. One person got out. He pulled his 'chute. It started to open, but it was so low that he hit the ground, and almost immediately the Stirling came in on top of him, and the whole thing erupted into an enormous ball of flame; that was all the petrol going up. There was about 2,000 gallons - that's about 8,000 litres, I think. I think there are four litres to a gallon? Anyway, it's a lot of petrol!

Denis describes the final moments of Stirling serial No. LK 121, Squadron code V8 – H from 570 Squadron, flown by F/S C.W. Culling, who perished with six other crew members near the town of Opheusden on September 18 (D+1) (4,5). The aborted Horsa glider, Chalk No. 5000, with RADAR equipment, made a premature landing (5). Both glider pilots and passengers escaped northbound, and crossed the river Rhine with the help of Dutch patriots. But that's another story.

Almost immediately as that was happening, and we were watching the plane going down, the glider that I was pulling – we had a very primitive communication, so it was very hard to hear them, but it was sufficient anyway – they said “We've been hit, we can't stay any longer, we're going down as well” and he pulled the lever, and he disconnected from the Stirling. There it was – there were two Stirlings and two gliders that just didn't get anywhere. One Stirling crashed, and I turned around, headed for home. While we were going back though, just at that point in time, the Bomb Aimer said “Hey, there's someone in a farmyard there in their blue uniform, (I don't know what he was) they're firing at us with a gun, an automatic gun, that they are pointing, a rifle.” We were going right over the top of him, and he said, “I hope they don't hit us” because we were so low. We were only at about 500 feet at the time. Anyway we went right over across the top of him, and the Rear Gunner (picture D) said, “I see him, he's still firing at me. Shall I fire back?” I said “Yes, of course.” He did that. He just gave a short burst. He had four machine guns in the tail, so that was it. I said “Did you hit him?” and he said “I don't know, everything just disappeared in a big loud of dust”, so obviously he didn't live. So that was it, that's part of war, I suppose. Anyway, we went home after that.

About two days afterwards (D+2) we had to do a supply drop. This was to drop supplies and ammunition to the people who were on the ground. It was very uneventful going through. There were lots of us, of course. When we got to the dropping zone – we found it easily because there was very good weather at the time. What we didn't know at the time was that the Germans had occupied the dropping zone, and they were waiting for us with 88mm guns. They were very, very effective. They could be fired on the ground sort of horizontally against tanks, or they could be fired against the planes going over very effectively, because they had very good controls. All they did was alter the type of shells they put in. Anyway, as we got over the zone, I dropped my load, which was 24 containers, I always remember that. We had a couple of dispatchers, and they used to stay in the back of the aircraft. We had a bit hole almost like an outside bath, almost at the end of the fuselage, so that you could drop things through this big hole, almost the width of the aircraft.

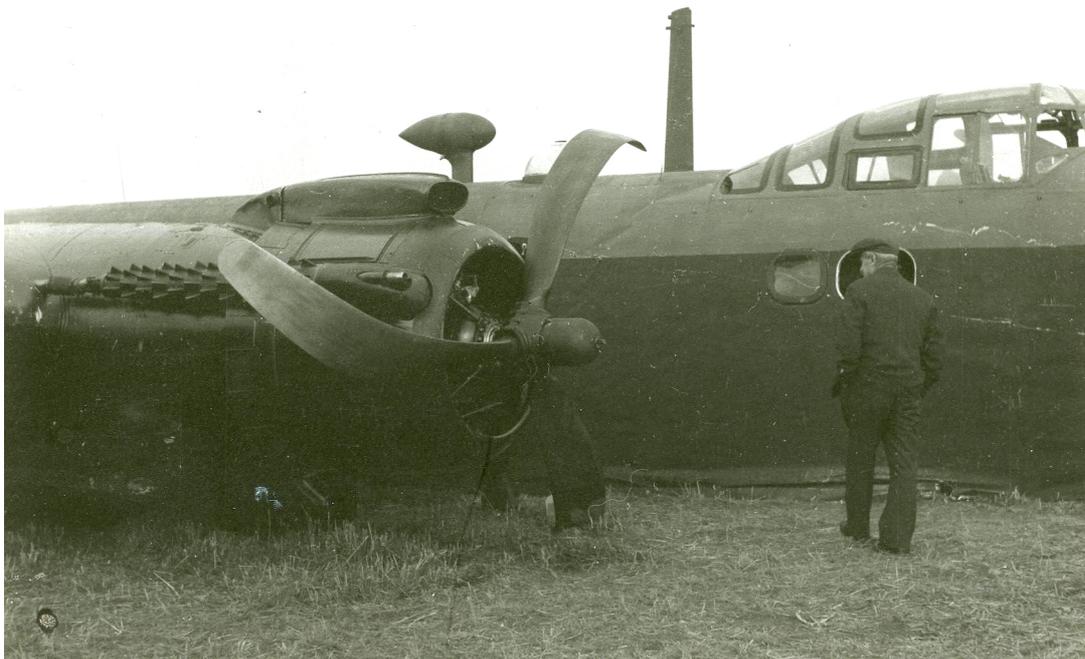
They used to drop their big packages. What they used to have in them I don't know, it was all packed by the Army, so they should know what they needed. Probably chocolate bars and things like that, Ha! Ha! I don't really know. Probably something mundane like .303 ammunition or shells or even more guns, I don't know. Anyway, they dropped those all out of the plane, and just as it was all gone, there were a couple of shell bursts ahead of us, nothing to worry about. Then all of a sudden one of them hit me just underneath the starboard wing, and it turned me right over on my side. I started sliding sideways, and turned, and went down to the ground. For the moment I was parallel. Then I saw that instead of looking at the horizon, I was looking at the ground, and I thought, "Oh gee, this is the way it all ends! Have I got twenty seconds to live?" I remember that flashing through my brain, and I thought, "No, I can't take that." And I pulled on the control columns, and turned the ailerons around, and just hoped for the best, and sure enough the aircraft just responded immediately.



*Picture H. The position of the skipper in the aircraft, where he did make life saving decisions.*

*Photo: Mr. L.A. van den Bergh, September 24, 1944*

I pulled up, and immediately started flying level, and then turned around and started heading for home. Then I realised that the *inner/outer?* starboard engine (picture I) was screaming its head off because the spinner (which contained all the necessary arrangements for controlling the engine speed) had obviously been shot off or damaged in some way that all the oil leaked out. The engine was just going hard, going faster and faster, and would eventually blow up. So all I could do, was shut that off. I switched it off, and made it feather in there. Feather means that the propeller turns sideways, so it wouldn't cut into the wing; it was just stationary, rather like you stop a windmill.



*Picture I. The inner starboard engine; a local farmer, Mr. J.F. Gremmen, in Sunday outfit, inspects the deadly wounded engine (~1500 hp) and illustrates unwillingly the mighty dimensions of one of the total four engines.*

*Photo: Mr. L.A. van den Bergh, September 24, 1944*

So, I thought "Well, that's not bad, three engines, we'll still get home on three engines." The Engineer we had, said, "If you look carefully, Pilot, you will see our port engine is on fire!" I had a second look at the engine, and sure enough you could see little bits of flame coming around, and lots of smoke though, almost as if it was oil smoke. I had to shut that one down as well. That left us with two. By that time I said, "I don't know what's going to happen now". I spoke to the navigator, and said "Are we over enemy territory?" and he said, "Yes, you're over Holland, but it's occupied by Germans in this part." I said, "Oh, gee, can we go towards the coast?" He said "Yes, but we will be flying over the sea for a long time if we do that, because we will be over the eastern side of England before we get there, and we would have to curve around to get back into the bottom part of England. I said "That's a bit too dangerous on two engines, so we'll just have to keep going." Then I

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said “We’ll head for Belgium or somewhere like that where the British are, and hope for the best!” He gave me a quick course, and we turned on that, and started following it. On this day, D+2, the so-called Southern Route had been selected, passing over Eindhoven, and then into Belgium territory, and subsequently a sharp bent to the west heading for the U.K. on the reciprocal flight. Then I noticed that although we only had two engines, there was another one, the port outer (I am guessing that when he refers to the inner engines, he doesn’t mention that in a specific way) it was just losing power. I looked at the controls, and everything was fine, but it was just losing power. I thought, “That’s it!” The airspeed was going down and down and down. We got to about 140 miles per hour, and I thought “We’re not going to make it anymore.” I tried to increase the speed, but it didn’t make any difference. It was getting very hard to control the aircraft as well. So, I said, “There’s nothing for it, Crew, you’d better abandon your positions, and we’ll have a crash landing. That’s it!”

When that happens, the crew leave their positions and they go in the section where the wings are, because that’s the strongest part of the aircraft. So if things break off or crash, at least that’s the strong bit, the bit in the fuselage, because it contains the whole weight of the aircraft, it goes through there. That’s where they had to lie. Almost immediately the Navigator said “Do we really have to lie down on the ground here?” I said, “Of course you do, why?” He said, “Because there’s a lot of hydraulic fluid pouring out from the back engines.” I said, “There’s nothing you can do.” So they had to lie down in all this oil. I thought that was a bit funny at the time, but still that was just a side issue.

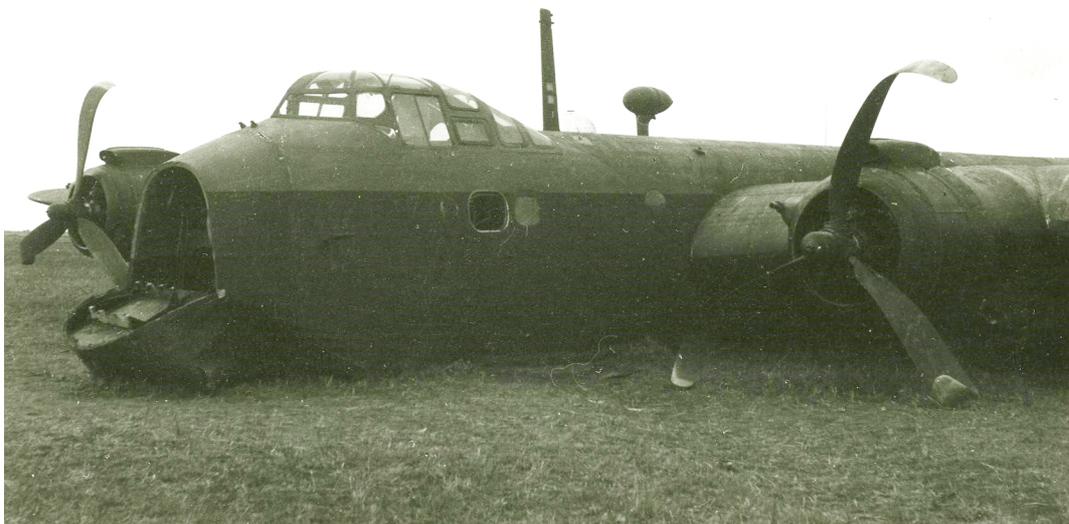
As I was coming in for the landing (see picture J) I could see the paddocks there, and we were going to go across the edge of them. I could see a herd of cows, and they were black and white. I thought, “Oh, gee I hope we don’t hit those. It will make a mess of everything. We wouldn’t be able to see, the blood and everything being flung up by the propellers. The cows were very good. I am sure they could see me coming, and they all started running, and when I got really close, you could see them all leaning over on one side as they were running in a big curve. They all kept out of the way. I thought that was very good.



*Picture J. Most likely V8 – U in the “finals” over the town of Megen.*

*Courtesy: Couwenbergh family, Megen, 1985*

They were lying there, and I was looking trying to keep the plane up, and then I thought, “That’s it, I’ve got to go in.” So I looked ahead, and the first field I saw I thought “We’ll go in there”, and I just throttled back and went in down low, and then over the fence, pulled the stick back, pulled the engines off, and just waited. We hit once with the tail only, and then, the real bump, you really hit the ground. And then you just wait. When we hit the ground I had safety belts on, you know, across my shoulders and everything. You also have little release things that you go forward about another six inches to nine inches, that’s a short distance. That is so you can reach instruments and press buttons, that sort of thing. As soon as you lean, it snaps on and holds you. That was fine, but on a crash-landing it didn’t hold me – I shot forward another nine inches, and I thought, “This is a silly situation holding the controls.” My head was rammed forward, and I couldn’t hold it up anymore, and I was looking at the ground. I could actually see where my feet and the rudders were, through to the nose. The nose was all broken underneath (picture K). We were digging a trench across the paddock. You could see the dirt boiling up underneath. I thought “Wow! That’s a lot of dirt we’re digging up. There’s going to be an enormous trench by the time we’re finished”. That was it, we did finally stop.



*Picture K. A distorted “lower lip” and absence of the transparent plastic fairing.*

*Photo: Mr. L.A. van den Bergh, September 19, 1944*

I do remember as I was looking down – I remember I had my hat on the side, and in my hat I had a sandwich which was supplied by courtesy of the Air Force, and also an orange, and I was very upset because oranges were in very short supply. I thought that the orange would be very nice to eat on the way home! It disappeared; it shot through when we hit the ground of course. It shot through, and disappeared into the nose,

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somewhere under the nose was a very nice orange! That really upset me, I don't know why, I brought it all that way, and then I didn't eat it.

Immediately the aircraft stopped, everyone jumped out the back, they could run through the fuselage and out the back (port) door. This was incidentally just nearing the lettering on the side of the aircraft. It was just near the U or right near the U.

It had taken me so long to get down out of the pilot seat and through the wing, which was two big fuselage crossings. You had to duck under the one, and then over the other one. If the plane had been on fire by the time I had got there, I would have been incinerated. So what they do is, they give the pilot an escape hatch above his head. You pull the lever backwards, and the bit of Perspex flies up, and you can stand on your seat and jump out or whatever you're going to do. Although you are still strapped into your parachute, I wasn't going to do that because I was only about 20 feet off the ground (that's comparable to looking through a window on the second floor) and stopped at the same time, so all I did was clamber down the side – after I had a look at it, and decided it wasn't going to burn or blow up – I'd slid down (picture L). I jumped up, put my arms on each side of the hole, and heaved myself upwards. I broke my watch. That was something else. First of all I had the orange, that was disturbing, and then I broke the face of my watch, the arms of it, the hands. Everything was a mangled mess, because at that time I used to have the watch on the inside of my wrist so I could look at it while I was holding the controls. That was the reason for that. I lost my watch.



*Picture L. On the far right side: Ms. J.G. de Kock. Second left, standing: the wife of the photographer.*

*Photo: Mr. Daan Scholten, courtesy: Mrs. P. Verhoeven – de Kock & Ms. J.G. de Kock, Haren/Oss, 1983*

I tried to claim that, by the way, when I got back. They said “No, you haven't got a chance because there's a clock on your instrument panel. What do you want a second clock for?” I didn't have an answer for that. I didn't know. I said, “I always wear a watch.” They said, “Well, tough luck for you, you should have left it behind.” They're very considerate, the Air Force, very considerate.

Anyway, we jumped out, and then we had to consider destroying the aircraft. That was the instruction; you had to try to destroy it. We had flares and we had an incinerator bomb – you just pull the lever and throw it onto the wing or somewhere where it will jam. It will just burn; it contains phosphorus too I believe. It just burns and burns. It would just burn and go through to the petrol tank, and the whole thing would blow up; that was the idea. So we got up on the wing, and saw where the filler cap was – on the top in those days – and we had no hatch to get into, so we had to cut a little hole into the top of the wing. It was quite easy because we had an axe, and we cut a flap out, and we were going to toss the incinerator into this hole so it would burn. Burn through to the petrol tank, and then the whole lot would go up.

I said, “Who’s the best thrower here?”, and it was consensus that the Navigator was the best thrower. He pulled the lever on the top, and it started to fizz a bit, and threw it at the wing. Instead of tossing it towards the hole, he tossed it across onto the other side on the ground, and it fizzed away like a firework. That was a flop. I said, “The only thing to do now is to lay our parachutes out in the fuselage. We had a Very pistol which fired coloured lights, but was also very hot. It would burn for about five minutes. It was very hot and very bright, and I thought that would set alight to the parachutes, and that would be it. It would eventually burn up, especially with all the hydraulic fluid there. We put a couple of parachutes in there, we released them, and they did spread out, and we put them around the fuselage, and then fired cartridges into them. You know what? It just burned holes in them, but didn’t set alight!

By that time we had a few visitors around us. One of them was speaking really good English, and he said, “Look, do you really need to burn those? Because it’s good material. It wasn’t silk, it was nylon, but there was lots of white cord, and it was very tough stuff. He said, “We’d love those.” I said “Well, we’ve tried to set them alight, and we couldn’t, so now they are all yours!” I left him to it. I did speak to the fellow later on, and I said “Well, do we have Germans around here?” and he said, “There are some, but they aren’t here at the moment.” I asked, “Do you know of anyone who can help us – point the way or give us directions?” He said the best thing was to speak to the headmaster at the local school, which was just one paddock away, I believe. He said “I can’t tell you anymore than that.”

I don’t think he wanted to. I think he knew a lot more, but he just didn’t want to tell me. He didn’t want to commit himself or the teacher.

The identity of this member of the initial Dutch welcome committee couldn’t be assessed. Among the few visitors could have been some girls on wooden shoes picking flowers on the pastures. For obvious reasons the schools had been closed temporarily.

I said, “Thank you very much”, and we plodded away over to the school and the house that was there (picture M). I went and saw the headmaster and his wife (picture N) who were there.

They welcomed us and said, “Welcome to Holland. It’s not probably what you expected, but anyway, you are here. Would you like a cup of tea?” Everybody said, “Yes, we’d love a cup of tea”, but it wasn’t what we expected. In England when you have a cup of tea, it’s very strong, it’s floating in milk, and there are two spoonfuls of sugar.” Of course the people in Holland didn’t have those sorts of things. They had milk but they didn’t use it. They didn’t have any sugar. She said, “Here’s a nice cup of tea.” (most likely of substitute quality). This is funny. The son in law informed me a long time ago that the visitors took with

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them thermos flasks with tea, and offered their hosts a cup of tea which was judged as delicious and did remember to pre-war days. We drank it, and we were very grateful. I'll tell you something: it was the first time I'd had tea without milk. It was a different taste. I didn't know what I was drinking! They said "Sorry, we haven't got any food at all, except for some small apples." We said that we would love a small apple. I remember thinking at the time "Gee, I don't know if they have enough apples, there were eight of us at the time. That is quite a crowd. Anyway, we said "Thank you", and talked about getting away, and he said "I will try and organise something for you while you are having your cup of tea." I don't know if he was a greengrocer, but it certainly was a greengrocer's van. It was one that I remembered: a middle-sized van, but it didn't have doors in the back, it had big shutters on the side, and you rolled them back. I suppose you could have a display of greengrocery things or something like that. They were on the sides. They would be ideal for a market situation. That is what appealed to me anyway. There was plenty of room around the edges, almost like seats. You could hold about ten people – five on each side. That is what we eventually ended up with – that is what he found for us.

He said, "The best thing to do, is not to go back (direction of Arnhem?) because the Germans are all over the place – they are retreating, but they are still all over the place. The best thing to do, is go to Grave because we know the Americans are there, they've landed there and have control of the bridge, and they are holding it. We can take you there, and by that time it will be about 4 o'clock, and it will start to get dark. You can't travel in the dark because you will just get shot up." We said "Okay, that'll be fine. If you can get us to Grave we can wait for the British to come through the same way that the Americans are." That was the idea. That morning, D+2, at about 9 o'clock a British spearhead had already reached the town of Grave; situated about ten miles east of Haren.

This van did arrive, the school teacher was very good, and we were very grateful. We said, "Look, we can't pay you. We don't have any money. There were so many people on this Arnhem trip that the little packets of money they had, were gone, and I was too late to get mine. We didn't have any money. We said "Sorry!" They said "If you like, would you sign the back of our picture (see picture N) that we can hide somewhere or hang it on the wall, and no one would think of turning it over. At least then we will remember your names." That's what we did, we all signed (see picture O). That is the last we thought about the school teacher, but he was very kind – a kind person, he and his wife. I will always remember them.

19 Sept. 1944. → handschrift dhr. H. Strijbos  
 (overleden op 1-12-77)

E. Hincks Pilot.  
 R. L. Hitchfield Navigator.  
 H. Fletcher Air Bomber.  
 G. L. Baker Engineer.  
 J. P. Smith. Wireless Operator  
 W. M. Gage Despatch crew.  
 R. E. Johnson. Air Gunner  
 R. Grantham Top. Despatch crew. (Airborne RASC)

Picture O. The backside of the wedding photograph. Signatures of the six RAF (already introduced) and two Air Despatch crew from RASC, Airborne Company: R. Grantham and G.A. Gamgee.

Courtesy: Strijbos/Gielis family, Haren/Weert, 1984

We got in this van, and we went off to Grave. That this van had been so quickly organized, means that the local patriots had been well-organized. Probably this was the third trip they made that day. The two other loads had been a mixture of British parachutists from 10th Bn (4th Para Brigade, 1st British Airborne Division), a USAAF C-47 crew and some demoralized German soldiers. In both previous cases the men had been unloaded just west of the town of Grave at a primitive Control Post to avoid to challenge trigger-happy parachutists of 504 Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR), 82nd US "All American" Airborne Division. I know it was back to Arnhem that way, and that is about all I do remember. We got there, and there were Americans who stopped him immediately on the road because he was a civilian. We all got out and said "Hello." They were all very friendly. This indicates that they displayed a relaxed attitude toward the intruders, and underlines my theory based on the story, once told to me by one of the patriots involved. They asked "Have you come to relieve us?", and I said, "No, we've come to be rescued!" That created a big laugh.

The van driver said "I'll go back now because it's getting dark, and you can't go anywhere, and I can find out if there is any change in where the Germans are, and we might be able to get you a bit closer to the British lines." I said, "That'd be fine." He said he wouldn't be able to come back until the morning, so we would have to stay where we were. We agreed, and stayed at Grave for the night. I said to the Americans there "Have you got any food?", that was the first thing! They said, "Yes, we've got K-rations." They were little tins of revolting food. It was like mashed potato type of thing. Apparently it was very nutritious, but it tasted awful. It was one of those magic things where you have

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one, and you aren't hungry for the rest of the day. We each had one of those as they had plenty. I asked if there was anywhere to sleep. He said we "could either sit up with us or watch the Rhine (river Maas) with your gun, I see you are all armed." We said we were armed. Then he said, "I know what you could do; get yourselves a couple of parachutes each", they had plenty of parachutes. This is indicative for a Parachute Dropping Area nearby. As they did apparently not cross a river, than this refers likely to the site southwest of Grave near Velp (NB) where the E-Company, 504 PIR, altogether 120 men and 66 para packs, had been dropped i.e. almost 200 parachutes. (6) "Go down (leave the dike!) to the graveyard, and you will find there are quite substantial areas there, and you can go into them, and you can sleep on the floor." That sounded a wonderful idea actually, because it was still light, and no one was scared of spooks or ghosts or that sort of thing. That is what we did, we were tired, over-exhausted because of the day. We decided to have a quick sleep, so we could get away and be active for the next day or early morning or even in the night-time.

We lay down in a row, like corpses in this crypt. I thought it was very appropriate. I'll tell you something, it was so very dark; we couldn't see a thing. You couldn't see your hand in front of your face. Anyway, we were all lying there, and there was a bit of chatter for a few minutes, and then it all went quiet. Everyone was dropping off to sleep, and all of a sudden there was a yelp, so I said, "What's wrong? What's happening?" He said, "Something bit my ear!" I remember my reply, a bit callous I suppose, "It's only a rat, just shoo it away!", and that was the end of that. I remember that, a rat (a species with a diurnal daily rhythm, main activity at the beginning and end of the night) in the crypt in the middle of the night was eating him. It was quite an experience.

We woke up next morning (D+3), very, very early, got out, and went to the toilet. No washing, there was nowhere to wash. There was a river there, but you didn't go down there because it was too dangerous to get back again. There were a lot of bodies there too.

While we were waiting an American Captain came up and he said, "Are you going back to the English lines?" (this is confusing because British troops had entered the town of Grave in the morning of the previous day on their way "thro" Nijmegen to Arnhem. This supports my hypothesis that it was the hamlet of Velp, just one mile south west of Grave, situated along a dike) and I said, "Yes, we're trying to." And he said, "Do you mind if I join you?" I noticed he had wings. I asked him if he flew a DC3 (the original civil version produced by Douglas USA, and now produced as a military version coded by the USAAF as C-47 Skytrain, affectionally called by the G.I.'s: "Gooney Bird". Over a thousand took part in this operation) and he said, "Yes, we got shot up, so I had to crash land." All his men had died but he had got out. Members of the Groesbeek Airborne Friends Association couldn't make a match with the crew of a specific C-47 of Troop Carrier Command, IX USAAF, which crash-landed - about eleven - in this area, assigned to the 82nd US Airborne Division. He looked all right; he didn't look to be damaged in anyway, but maybe mentally he was.

That is the way it affects you, I suppose. I said, "Yes, please come along. We would be glad to have you because you have a bigger revolver than us. Yours is a 44, and ours are only a 38." He liked the idea of that, and he said he would stay out in front. As if it would make any difference!!

Shortly after that the greengrocer man – I will call him that – turned up, and he said he could get us to the first town, I think it was either Eindhoven or Nijmegen; most likely in the direction of Eindhoven, and as Velp was the starting point of that day, he refers most

likely to the town of Veghel or St. Oedenrode. He said he could get us to there, and then we could cut across, and we'll get on the main road where the actual British Army was with the tanks and things. I don't know how he knew this, but he did. He said he could get us there. We hopped into the van again, and closed down the shutters. We sat down. It was like being in a lift where you know something is happening but you are not quite sure what. We went on and on and on. Eventually we did stop, and he came and opened the shutters, and said, "You can get out now. The British Army is all around us." Sure enough looking left and right on the road there were the tanks and things pulled up on the side. There were a lot of transport vehicles. I didn't really know why, but it became obvious later on that it was ammunition and food that they had to eat. There was lots of fuel. Everything was parked along the side of the road. That was where the chief people were, the ones who were controlling the road. He sort of disappeared at that point in time. I walked along, and saw the man in charge, whoever he was. I wouldn't have a clue, Army people. They were very glad to see me. He asked "Have you been shot down?", and I said, "Yes, we got through to Arnhem all right. We were right on the edge of the dropping zone. I don't know where our people were, surely they weren't all wiped out?" He offered us some food in the mess. There was a tent on the side of the road. I don't know how they do that, in double quick time! They pop them up, and pop them down. We went into this little tent, and sure enough there was a little fold up table and a bench on each side. He said "Sit there, my batman will come along in a moment and have hot food for you." I replied "That'll be really great! I'd love some tea, do you have any milk?" He answered "Oh yes, we've got milk", so everything was right.

I don't know why, but I expected to see very elaborate plates and saucers for the tea and that sort of thing – teacups. I don't know why I did. Even though it was the Officer's mess (they were quite well up the scale) they had just tin plates and spoons. He came along with a bucket-affair, and he ladled out some soupy stuff with corned beef in it. It was delicious and hot. There was a hot cup of tea with plenty of sugar.

Anyway, we were right in the middle of having this, and there was this awful crash, and I jumped out of my skin. It was so loud it hurt my ears. I jumped up, and went to the flap in the tent, and said, "What was that?" He said it was one of the tanks just over the fence. They were firing at the hill just over there, and pointed across the road, and up to the other side where there was a little clump of trees. He told us that somewhere in the back there are either one or two German tanks, and he said they had been firing at them onto the road. He said they had hit the ammunition truck already. That was just starting to go up. He said they had stalled them completely, and they couldn't see them to fight back, and they couldn't move any of their stuff along. He said any tank would take a side hit if they went along. I asked if they could fire back, and he said no, not until they could get their ammunition truck out of the way. They had to wait until it stopped exploding. It was all going Pop! Pop! Pop! Suddenly a shell would take off, and if it hit anyone it would kill them. If it went into a truck it would blow it up. It was a serious thing.

So we just hung around for a couple of hours while this ammunition truck blew up. There was only the one road, so nothing was going passed it. It was just roaring away with flames everywhere. There were lots of explosions too. Everyone kept right out of the way. This road, between Veghel and Eindhoven, was under enemy fire at that time from a German armoured brigade, which had just arrived east of this interdiction: the newly formed "Corridor" or "Hell's Highway".

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When that died down, the fellow asked if we would like to go back to the lines. I said “Yes, that’s the idea. We’d like to get back to somewhere where there’s an airfield – an RAF airfield - and we can get a lift home. He told us that would be Brussels. It would be the best bet. He said on our way he could give us transport, but would we go as guards because there were eight of us. He said they were short of men. They had a driver, but they needed a guard. I thought that was a bit strange. You don’t need a guard for going into territory that isn’t hostile. There weren’t any Germans on the way back to the Brussels end of things. I didn’t really understand it. He said he could get thirty POWs on each truck, and that will get rid of them all, and give us more people to manoeuvre, and we won’t have to worry so much about both sides being shot up from the front, and having dangerous people in the back. I asked if they were just POWs, and he said “Yes, they are, but they are very dangerous because most of them are Hitler Youth. They feel they are going to win the war. They are quite willing to die for their country, on the spot! I asked if we had to look after thirty of them on the truck, and he said yes, you have a gun. The driver has a rifle, and they won’t have anything. They will all be standing up; there won’t be any room to sit down. They can’t do anything, they have to stand still, not sway and fall over the side. He said if they were run over, no one would bother to stop. I said we would do it. That is what happened. We were the leaders of the ‘diamond’.

Sure enough they turned up with a great load of POWs, and there were about thirty of them on the open truck. They had just taken the canvas off, and just had them standing there. We were able to sit down. We had only gone a little way, and had gone past the first ammunition truck that had blown up, but they didn’t tell me about the second one that was just going up at the time. It was something that happened just as we were rolling along. We had only gone about a quarter of a mile, if that, there was another truck that was hit, and it was just starting. Bang! Bang! Bang! Not that far ahead of us either! Our truck driver, he was an old hand at it, he just slammed on the hand brake, switched off the engine and rolled out the side of the truck. Of course, I didn’t wait much longer than that. As soon as I saw he was gone, and the truck was going to stop anyway, I ran around the front with the driver, and he just flopped into the ditch. He had his gun with him, he didn’t forget that. He studied the fellows on the back on the truck. I had lain down beside him, and asked what we should do next. He told me to pull out my gun, and point it at them. He told me if anyone should put their leg over the side, to shoot them. I said “Really?”, and he said, “Really! There are only 30 of them, and I’ve only got one shell up the spout in the gun, and I could maybe get another one in if I do it properly. You’ve got six shells, and you won’t get any in at all by the time you open it up and try to put some more in. They’ll be on us, thirty of them less seven or maybe eight. The rest will be here, and the same will happen for all the rest. If they see it happening at the front, they will all follow the lead.” There were eight trucks behind us, seven trucks behind us. I stood looking at them, then the ammunition really started to roar. It was burning hard on this second truck that was alight. We just lay there, and I was pointing the gun. There were a couple of them that just twitched and half put their leg out. It was dangerous; there was no doubt about that. There were bullets and all sorts of things flying around. There were flares going up, it was quite an exhibition with smoke and flames everywhere. It would have been good to watch from further down the road. It’s a pity it couldn’t have been a bit further away, because it would have been safer, but still that was it.

We just lay there in this ditch looking over the edge. The people in the truck, they didn’t move, they did twitch, but they changed their minds. Better to be shot by a shell than shot by a bullet. I suppose we waited there for about twenty minutes. One tank came

along, and it had a bulldozer blade on it. They put the blade up, so it would protect the driver of the tank. Anything that came off the burning ammunition truck would just hit the bulldozer blade. I thought it was clever, because it was a bulldozer and a tank at the same time. They came along, and just pushed this thing off the road into the ditch. As soon as that happened, it all just seemed to fade away. It seemed to be quiet again. The tank disappeared; I don't know where it went.



*Picture P. Sherman tank-dozer in the town of Veghel, September 19, 1944. Veghel is situated along the Corridor, nicknamed 'Hell's Highway', the route that Hincks and his companions travelled (September 20, 1944) in the opposite direction southbound to Brussels. Photo: © Johan van Eerd (BHIC, photo [BCV7743](#)).*

This describes the situation at a part of the “Corridor”, the narrow road of advance or Club Route between Eindhoven and Nijmegen, just south of the town of Son. German armour on the east flank did try to blast away allied traffic following this narrow provincial road. Bowsers and ammunition loads are the most vulnerable vehicles. This situation is described and illustrated by Karel Margry in his book “Operation Market-Garden”, Volume II, chapter: Hell's Highway, September 20, page 528 and further (a reference book covering this operation; highly recommended). Denis adds interesting details after 66 years.

Everyone got back into the trucks, and then the traffic started (around 11 o'clock) coming from the other direction, so we knew it was all right. Keep to the right, not the left, or

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you'll hit someone going to other way – I remember that one. Off we went, on and on and on. I don't know where we went to, but eventually we did stop, and the driver said, "This is it". Most likely the town of Leopoldsborg (BE). This is where we get rid of our prisoners. We pulled off the road a bit, and sure enough there were the military police still with white belts on and red hats; all this type of thing. Red stripes everywhere. When they saw me, they all saluted. That was very unusual. I responded, because I still had my hat on. I only had battle dress on, but I still had my dress hat. I always carried that with me.

I said, "I've a great load of prisoners here." They said, "Okay, we'll take care of it all, you just wait around." He said, "Okay, but I've got something I want to show you." He shouted out orders – he was a sergeant in the police force, I think. He shouted orders to someone, and people appeared from everywhere, and started organising all these prisoners. He said "Come with me, I've got something I want to show you." We walked on and on and on, and we came to a big field. There was row after row after row of POWs. He said, "You were shot down, weren't you?" I replied, "Yes, we were, and lost everything." He said "Now's your chance, we'll go in, because these prisoners have just arrived. They have had to empty their pockets, and it's all on the ground in front of them. You walk along, and if you see anything you think you need or would like as a souvenir, then you bargain with the fellow. You offer him a cigarette, if he takes it, it doesn't matter or if he doesn't take it, it doesn't matter. You just put the cigarette down on his pile, and you take what you want. That's the barter. You're not allowed to take it without bartering; you have to pay for whatever you take." I replied "It's not much of a barter!" and he answered, "We don't talk about that, we just do it. You were shot down, weren't you? That was very naughty of them, and they have to suffer now, because they didn't do a proper job and kill you." There you are, that is the other side of the coin.

So, I got myself a watch – a 24-hour watch, I had never even seen one before! It went for 24 hours, and it had a blue moon and a bluish section on one side, and a yellow sun and a yellow section on the other side. I don't know what happened to it. I had a lighter made out of a 30mm cartridge. It was a good thing, it worked very well. They were souvenirs, that was the big thing. I took them from the chap, he twitched a bit, and I twitched a bit, and I had my hand on my gun. I think he realised that he'd lost that, and he did.

Then the sergeant said, "I'll get you transport to Brussels Airport or something, because there is something going that way. They can drop you off. You will have to sit in the back of course. I said it didn't matter. We were on the back of a truck. It was covered in, but the back was open. Off we went, we were going along, and eventually we got to – or close to – Brussels. We stood looking out the back, and as we went past some people, they were clenching their fists, and punching the air at us – as if to say, "I wish I could kill you!" We were waving to them. I thought it was strange. This is not the sort of treatment you expect. You expect them to wave or smile or say hello, but not this fist business. Somebody said, "You know what's wrong? We've got the wrong uniforms on. They're blue and very dirty – battle dress – and they look as if they are Luftwaffe uniforms, they used to wear blue! They think we are German prisoners of war, so that is why they are giving us the fist." I thought that was all right then, so I just kept waving to show I didn't care, just to stir them up if nothing else.

We did go into Brussels. We were dropped off. We did wander around, but we had no money. We kept wandering around, and eventually found our way to the airport. Airport – well, it was just an airfield anyway. There were DC3s there all over the place. We went in and saw the controller there, and said we wanted a lift back, and he told us he could

get us one. They were all American. It only took about half an hour, and he had found us a plane. We all clambered on. I spoke to the pilot, and told him we were from Rivenhall in Essex, just outside London. He said that was fine, and that he would take us there. He said he would speak to his navigator, and he explained it all. I sat up the front with him. We took off with our crew in the back, and some Army people too. We went over the Channel, and it was nice to see the White Cliffs of Dover again. I thought “There we are, never say ‘die!’” We went to somewhere outside London. He said he was supposed to go somewhere near Croydon, and asked me where was Rivenhall? I told him it wasn’t too far away, near Chelmsford. He got the Navigator up, and we gave him a course, and we went back to Rivenhall where he dropped us off.



*Picture Q. 570 RAF Squadron, Rivenhall, April 1945; the mighty wings cover all ranks involved just a few weeks before VE – Day. “Yes, it’s including “dad” and five of the crew who flew with dad”;* Julie Thornton, 2010

*Courtesy: Hincks’ family, Australia, 2010*

It was just at dinnertime in the evening by that time. I felt a bit dirty and grubby, but I was so hungry I’ll go straight in and have a meal. I plopped in with my three-day beard – but I was so blond it didn’t really matter – I felt grubby with my dirty old battle dress that had been in a ditch, and all sorts of things. I did look a bit dirty! I must admit I did wash my hands. My wife used to tell me “Wash your hands!”, so I did. I went in and sat down, and sure enough as soon as I did, people started to say, “Oh, you’re back, are you? We thought you were dead! So who is dead then?” I explained the business about what

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happened. They said “There’s something wrong here, you were shot down in flames!” I told them it wasn’t really like that. We were very close to being shot down, but we did recover, and we were in flames, but we put the flames out, but we didn’t get very far, that was the only trouble. Even to this day I don’t know the place where we were, the area, at all. The only spot I remember is Somme, and a place with a name like ‘Van Somme’ that was close by. That was the only bit that I remembered from that.

I can’t match this with a name of a Dutch town along his route back home, with the exception of the town of Son. I did already refer to a Dutch patriot, the co-driver of the van involved in the polder area around Macharen/Megen/Haren. It was Mr. Jacques van Sommeren, and I am happy to disclose his name here, may be Denis mixed this up.

They said, “Oh well, okay, have your meal, welcome back, it is very good to see you. Did you have any casualties?” I told them “No, we even brought our two Army people back!” They replied, “We should get rid of them!” We were back in business again. After our meal they took us over to the store somewhere, and I got all my clothing back. He helped me to carry all my things back again, all my gear, and put it on my bed that had been stripped out completely and made up for the next person. Everyone had a big cupboard at the end of the bed, where you put your clothing. I used to get an allocation of three eggs a week, and I’d saved mine up for two or three weeks to take them home to my beloved wife, bless her soul. I used to give her the eggs because they were in short supply. Anyway, my eggs were missing! “You’ve pinched all my eggs!” They said “We gave them to the mess!” I told them I wanted them back, but they told me I didn’t have a chance. If you go into the Mess and say you want half a dozen eggs that were stolen from you, no one will listen to you. That was true enough, but I lost my eggs. I did get everything else back. I asked him if he went through everything, and he said, “Oh, yes, we go through everything, especially correspondence. If there is any reference to any person other than the family, we destroy the letters. It’s bad enough to have a casualty in a family without having something awful happen on the domestic scene, put it that way.”

Then I thought I had better telephone my wife. She was very surprised, because she had had a telegram saying I had been killed in action, not presumed missing or anything like that. I was reported killed in action. These things don't sound very positive, but sometimes they make mistakes. What an adventure. I did follow it up afterwards; after the war was over.



*Picture R. Rivenhall, summer 1945 (?), Stirling Mk IV's from "B" Flight, code "V8" and "A" Flight, code "E7" from 570 RAF Squadron, 38 Transport Group.*

*Courtesy: Hincks' family, Australia, 2010*



*Picture S. Haren, A man, a woman and a girl posing by the wreck of the Stirling.*

*Photo: Mr. Daan Scholten; courtesy: Ms. J.G. de Kock, Haren/Oss, 1983*

I was told to present myself to an Army Film Unit, and they called themselves the Arnhem Film Unit. They made a film about it called "Theirs is the Glory!" Everybody who was connected with Arnhem –actively connected with it – took part in it. So everyone you saw in it, was part and parcel of the original battle. I hung around for a day or so, and thought it was so boring, sitting around, doing nothing. It was action scenes, and I said to one of the producers "Can you do something for us? Can you give us something to do?" He replied, "I can't help your crew, but I can give you a Jeep and a driver, and we can make you a co-ordinator. That would be a good idea. There was the Canadian Army, and he said "When we go there, they just throw us out again. We are trying to get messages back to England, but as you are in the Air Force you would get attention, especially if you sound as if you know what you are talking about." So, I became the co-ordinator for all that sort of thing. I used to help quite a bit. They wanted three tanks, for example, so I went to a depot, where they had rows and rows of tanks. All over Europe of course, they had these depots that contained millions of gallons of petrol and all the tanks and things that had been handed in, as it were. They weren't being used anymore; this was after the war. I don't know what happened to them, I suppose they were sold off to the buyer who would pay the most, but most of it was scrap metal. I know all the planes were scrap metal. Anyway, I used to get these things for them. I didn't stay at an Army base, for this I stayed in lodgings with a Dutch family. Just as a side issue in the evenings, it was very boring, they would have the radio on, and I wouldn't have a clue what they were talking about. They didn't have TV in those days. I didn't have any books, but they had a lot them, and they were in Dutch. They had two children there who were

about four or five years old, and I used to read to them quite a lot, and they used to think that was a real show.

There was an interesting experience: I had to get about twenty to thirty German uniforms. I said, "Where on Earth am I going to get German Uniforms? All the Germans have gone, and they are all back in Germany now." I was told: "We had a lot of Dutch people who had to join the German Army, and they thought that was a good thing to do, and expected to be on the winning side. It didn't turn out that way. All those people are in prison, or at least held up in a compound until they were put on trial and something happened. There are all their uniforms – so we've got a couple of rooms stacked out with uniforms." There must have been a couple of thousand people in this place. They were all in stacks and all sizes. We took a great load on our Jeep, and tied it down. He said "Would you like to buy something?" He produced a little .22. It was a very small calibre chromium gun. He said he got it from a senior person – a general or someone like that – and they had tucked it in their belt. You could hardly see it, and you could hardly feel it because it was behind his leather belt. He said they all had one. That was their final defence; it would fire about three or four shots. He said he could let me have it for a few hundred cigarettes. It was very cheap. There were a lot of cigarettes going around at the time, because that was a method of bartering rather than the money side. Cigarettes were in high demand. I said I didn't really want the gun, but it would be nice as a souvenir. He asked how much I had, and I told him I had about twenty cigarettes on me. I did smoke at the time. You could give me a handful of souvenirs, and that's what he did. There were little Swastikas off their clothing, armbands with Swastikas for special reasons like Hitler Youth or something like that. A big handful of things, and I paid about a hundred cigarettes. I always remember I said: whatever happens I must get a helmet. He said, "What do you want a helmet for?" I said, "I want it for a coal scuttle. I always wanted a German helmet for a coal scuttle." I remember my father used to talk about a coal scuttle made out of an old German helmet, so I thought I would have one too. He found one, just like that.

After the war if you ever hear of a duck (**Dukw**) – which is one of those transport vehicles that can go on a road, and it can become a boat when you come to a river, because it has propellers on the back. It has big tyres on the back, and you let the tyres down to become very spongy so it grips on the mud, and then when it gets into the water it floats. It can carry about thirty people, I think. You pull the lever, and the propeller starts. There were levers for steering, and you go across to the other side, and you pull the lever, and the wheels go in the mud. When you are all clear, you can then pump up the tyres again. Anyway, I got this duck, and the chap said "Would you like a driver?", and I said, "No, I've never driven one of these, but I'd like to." He responded, "Sure, go ahead!" It sounds silly now, but he just gave me the duck, and he gave me three tanks, and he also gave me something else. There was no question of signing for anything; I just took it. I don't know what happened to it. I handed it over, and they did have river scenes where they had the people getting out of Arnhem and crossing the river, and maybe that were where they used them. I drove it in. I had never driven any truck of any size, and I was going through Arnhem with that! Every time I changed gears I couldn't double declutch. I used to hesitate, but I didn't do it right, and it used to crash the gears. They must have thought I was drunk. I kept going, and didn't look back.

That's all I can think of at the moment. This all came about because my daughter Julie went to Italy, and she went to Germany and then to Holland to see my wife's brother's

Edward Denis Hincks – Operation Market Garden daughter (Julie’s cousin) Jany Ridout van Hartley. They were still alive, and she wanted to see them. They were speaking, and happened to mention that I had been to Arnhem and crashed.

That is how it all started. If I think of anything else I will let you know. I hope you are well, and trust you are still investigating.

Thank you very much.

Best wishes to you.

Denis Hincks

Postscript

Just as we were being shot down, just as we were hit, and immediately afterwards, and we were flying, the wireless operator said a piece of shrapnel came up through his legs and through his desk without touching him, and went right into the three radio sets he had stacked in front of him. He said, “I don’t have a single radio left. I didn’t hurt myself at all! I was a bit worried when I saw where the hole was, it should have hit me in the body, and all my private parts would have gone to pieces!” I thought that was good luck. It would have been just as bad if it had hit his leg there, because there are so many big arteries there, and he would have bled to death before anyone could get to him.

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Author’s note

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