



PILOT OFFICER - MAURICE MCHUGH

Operation Market Garden – Netherlands 1944



## Introduction

My name is Peter John McHugh.

My uncle, Maurice McHugh, was an Australian Pilot Officer flying a Short Stirling Bomber with 620 squadron of the Royal Air Force in WW2.

Maurice's plane was shot down by flak and he was killed in Holland on the 20 September 1944 while flying a resupply mission to British troops near Arnhem in the failed campaign called Operation Market Garden more commonly known as a "Bridge Too Far".

Maurice was 21 years old and one of only 13 Australians killed in this tragic and futile battle to liberate Holland.

Like many families during the war it created a great deal of anguish not knowing precisely what happened to Maurice in a country so far away from home.

Compelling original documents that I have recently unearthed on the internet together with a visit to Holland in 2014 to meet some of the surviving eye witnesses has enabled me to finally piece together what exactly happened to Maurice and his aircrew 70 years ago and about his extraordinary feats of bravery.

This is my story of discovery.....

February 2015.

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## His early life.

Maurice McHugh was born in St Kilda, a suburb of Melbourne on 9 July 1923. He was one of four children to Augustus and Annie May McHugh. He had two older sisters Nancy (1919) and Kathleen (1921) as well as a younger brother John (1925).



*Augustus and Annie May McHugh – wedding day 1918*

Maurice's father, Augustus McHugh, worked as a signalman for the Victorian Railways and moved about State before finally settling in Preston in a newly built family home at 34 Breffna Street in 1942 where they stayed for the remainder of their lives.



*The McHugh children - Nancy, Kathleen, Maurice and John at Ballarat gardens (circa 1927)*

Maurice was educated at South Preston Primary School and Northcote Boys High school.



*McHugh family (circa 1937) – standing from left Kathleen, Augustus, Maurice – sitting Nancy and John.*





*Brothers - John (on bike) and Maurice*

Maurice had a girlfriend in 1941, Dumell McDonald, who also lived nearby in Preston. They wrote to each other while he was away in England during the war. Dumell is now 90 years old and lives in Queensland.



*Maurice with Dumell at the Royal Botanic gardens in Melbourne - 1941*

Dumell kept in touch with the McHugh family long after the war. She was my mother's bridesmaid in 1948.



*Dumell with Maurice, Augustus and Nancy at Breffna St (circa 1942)*



*My mother and father (John and Roma McHugh) at their wedding 1948 with best man Norm Green and bridesmaid Dumell McDonald*

## Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF).

Maurice joined the Air Force Reserve in October 1941. He stated his employment on his enlistment papers as a law clerk at Rigby & Fielding, 60 Market Street in Melbourne.

In February 1942, when he was 18 years and 6 months old Maurice enlisted in the RAAF. His service number was 410858.

He began his RAAF training with 4 Initial Training School (4 ITS) at Victor Harbour in South Australia.



*Maurice at 4 ITS - standing centre row third from left*

After initial training Maurice progressed to 11 Elementary Flying School (11 EFTS) at Benalla in June 1942 where he learned basic flying skills in DH84 tiger moths.



*11 EFTS - Benalla*

He continued his training at 6 Service Flying Training School (6 SFTS) at RAAF Station Mallala, South Australia in October 1942 where he flew Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation (CAC) Wirraway trainers before converting to twin engine Avro Anson's.



*RAAF Wirraways*

Maurice graduated at Mallala with his "wings" and the rank of Flight Sergeant on the 5 February 1943.



*Avro Anson at Mallala*

Maurice had a younger brother, John McHugh, who was my father. He was also a RAAF pilot but travelled to Canada as part of the Empire Training Scheme in 1944.



*Brothers, John and Maurice McHugh (with his wings) at 34 Breffna St, Preston, circa Feb 1943, before sailing for England. This was the last time he saw his family.*



*Flight Sergeant Maurice McHugh*

## Posted to the Royal Air Force (RAF) in England.

Maurice's RAAF records show he embarked from Melbourne for England on the 6 March 1943 and arrived at Halifax on the 19 April 1943.

In England his Air Force record lists a series of postings to training courses including 15 Advanced Flying Unit (15 AFU), 81 Operational Training School (81 OTU), then conversion to heavy bombers and glider towing operations including 1665 Heavy Conversion Unit (1665 HCU) at Tilstock in Shropshire.

Maurice's record received a slight blemish in July 1943 for the somewhat minor transgression of "wearing his air crew suit beyond the confines of the camp contrary to pupil's standing orders" and he received a severe reprimand. The next day he was in trouble again for insolence to Flight Lieutenant Butcher, but with no further action taken.

Maurice also got into trouble in May 1944 for flying too low over the airfield. He was flying an aircraft with a horsa glider in tow across the middle of the airfield at about a 100 feet above the ground. I wonder if he buzzed the control tower too?

On completion of his training, on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Maurice and his aircrew were posted to 620 Squadron based in RAF Fairford, Gloucestershire flying a Short Stirling Bomber.



The Short Stirling was the first four-engine British heavy bomber of the Second World War. It entered service in early 1941 but had a relatively brief operational career as a bomber, being relegated to second line duties from late 1943, when other more capable four-engine RAF bombers, specifically the Handley Page Halifax and Avro Lancaster, took over the strategic bombing of Germany.

The Short Stirling was used for mining German port areas and fulfilled a major role as a glider tug and supply aircraft during the allied invasion of Europe in 1944–1945.

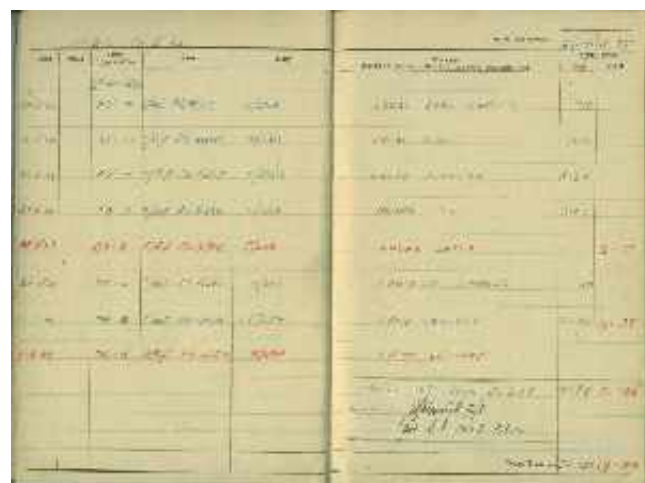
#### Details for Short Stirling Bomber Mk 1V

Length:	87ft 3in (26.58m)
Wingspan:	99ft 1in (30.19m)
Height:	22ft 9in (6.93m)
Empty Weight:	46,900 lb (21,274 kg)
Take Off Weight:	70,000 lb (31,752 kg)
Maximum Speed:	270mph (435kmh)
Cruising Speed:	200mph (323kmh)
Ceiling:	17,500ft (5,332m)
Range:	2,010 miles (3,242km) with 3,500lb (1,589kg) bombload
Power plant:	Four Bristol Hercules XVI of 1,650hp each
Propellers	Three-bladed metal fully feathering propeller
Payload:	14,000lbs (6,356kg)
Crew (6):	Pilot, navigator, flight engineer, bomb aimer, wireless operator, rear gunner.
Defensive Armament:	2 x .303 Browning machine guns in tail turret.



*Dona ferentes adsumus*  
(Translation: "We are coming bringing gifts")

In Dennis Williams 2008 book titled "Stirling's in Action with Airborne Forces" there is this account from Maurice's Flight Engineer, Sergeant David Evans in relation to D-Day – *"Very early on D-Day we were awakened at Tilstock to be told that the invasion of Europe had started, and that we were posted to Fairford. We had only a slept an hour or two, after landing from a long cross- country flight the night before. Although tired and bleary eyed, we had a terrific feeling of elation, for our chance had come at last to pit our wits against the enemy. We got our clearance from Tilstock arranged in double time, and were on our way south and nearer to where the action was taking place."*



A page of Flight Sgt Evans log book for June 1944



Short Stirling Bomber Mk 1V

Maurice survived D-Day flying operations with 620 Squadron dropping paratroopers of the 6th Airborne Division near Caen as part of Operation Tonga.



*Pilot Officer, Maurice McHugh – England - date unknown*

Maurice resigned from the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) on 7 May 1944 to take up a commission as a Pilot Officer with the Royal Air Force (RAF). I am puzzled why this was necessary and why he wasn't able to remain as an Australian Officer. Maybe it was just the times. I noticed that on his enlistment papers in 1942 he declared himself as a "British Subject". There didn't seem an option to list as an "Australian Citizen".

According to another account from Sgt Evans, once Maurice became an officer he left the other crew members for the officers' mess, where one evening at a social gathering he met Air Vice-Marshal Hollinghurst, who was in command of 38 Group. *"On this occasion, he invited the AOC to fly with them when we were next operational. Soon after they had completed their pre-flight checks, Air Vice-Marshal Hollinghurst arrived at the*

*dispersal point, in a staff car, accompanied by the Station Commander. The crew formed a line and stood to attention as Maurice introduced each of in turn. The AOC made it clear that once in the aircraft the pilot would be in command and that they were to take no notice of their VIP passenger. He sat in the second pilot's seat and it was a very uneventful but successful operation. He must also have been pleased, because he flew with Maurice and his crew again later in August. On this later occasion they were diverted to another airfield on their return where he joined them in the mess for bacon and eggs, causing a hullabaloo amongst the staff serving the meal".* The diversion, to which David Evans referred, was early in the morning of 3 August 1944, as forty out of sixty-five aircraft from 38 Group landed away, mostly at airfields in West Wales. Out of twenty-two Fairford Stirling's returning from operations, sixteen went to either Brawdy in Pembrokeshire or Fairwood Common (now Swansea Airport) on the Gower peninsula.



*Inside a Short Stirling Bomber preparing for take-off – painting by famed English war artist Dame Laura Knight*

According to Sgt Evans log book, Maurice and his crew went on to fly about 25 secret night missions between June and September 1944 to resupply allied forces, special operations and the French resistance.



*In England with other pilots— Maurice standing on right*

## Operation Market Garden – “A Bridge Too Far”.

In September 1944 the allies under the command of Field Marshal General Montgomery mounted an ill-fated campaign to capture seven strategic bridges across Holland and enter Germany in a battle more commonly referred to as “A Bridge Too Far”.

Montgomery wanted to circumvent the northern end of the Siegfried Line and this required the operation to seize the bridges across the Maas (Meuse River) and two arms of the Rhine (the Waal and the Lower Rhine) as well as several smaller canals and tributaries. Crossing the Lower Rhine at Arnhem would allow the Allies to encircle Germany's industrial heartland in the Ruhr from the north.

Operation Market Garden made large-scale use of airborne forces, whose tactical objectives were to secure the bridges and allow a rapid advance by British armoured units into Northern Germany.

Several bridges between Eindhoven and Nijmegen were captured at the beginning of the operation but General Horrocks' XXX Corps ground force advance was delayed by the demolition of a bridge over the Wilhelmina Canal, an extremely overstretched supply line at Son, and failure to capture the main road bridge over the river Waal before 20 September.

At Arnhem, the British 1st Airborne Division encountered far stronger resistance than anticipated. In the ensuing battle, only a small force managed to hold one end of the Arnhem road bridge and after the ground forces failed to relieve them, they were overrun on 21 September.

The rest of the division, trapped in a small pocket west of the bridge at Oosterbeek had to be evacuated on 25 September. The failure of Operation Market Garden ended allied expectations of finishing the war by Christmas 1944.

It was however the most ambitious airborne operation ever carried out and its staggering scale can be judged by the following figures:

• Number of troops dropped by parachute	20190
• Number of troops landed by glider	13781
• Number of gliders	2613
• Number of sorties flown by troop carrier aircraft (including glider towing and re-supply) <sup>1</sup>	5067
• Aircraft in support roles	4771
• Tonnes of supplies dropped	2585

Over the intervening years, much has been written about the wisdom of this operation and the controversy surrounding its overall failure. But the operation certainly was a bold one, not least because of the sheer scale of the airborne component which was more than double the numbers delivered by air into Normandy on D-Day in June 1944.

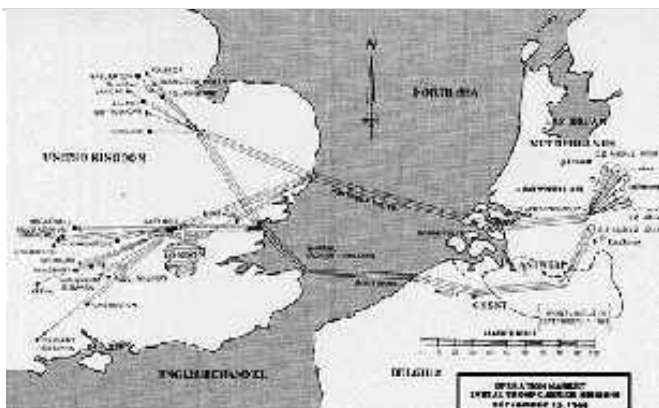
Perhaps its greatest weakness was that it was also an invasion plan was very hastily put together with only a week between its approval and execution, unlike D-Day that took over a year to plan and organise. Or, maybe important factors such as the presence of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> SS German Panzer Division near Arnhem that were being refitted and which had been reported by the Dutch Resistance were overlooked or discounted.

But everything always seems inevitable in hindsight.

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<sup>1</sup> Between 17 and 25 September 1944, Stirling's and Jackson's of 4th and 6th Group flew 628 sorties to the Arnhem / Oosterbeek area. Of these, 89 aircraft did not return.





*Flight plans for Arnhem invasion - 17 September 1944.  
620 Squadron flew the northern route from Fairford.*

On the first day of the Operation Market Garden, Sunday 17 September 1944, thirty eight aircraft took off from RAF Fairford in Gloucestershire flying along the northern route to Arnhem carrying 1 Parachute Brigade and 1 Air Landing Brigade.



*Short Stirling's, 620 Squadron at RAF Fairford preparing for Operation Market Garden – Sunday 17 September 1944*

Maurice and his crew of five took off at 10.50 hrs in their Short Stirling Bomber (L J-946) towing an airspeed horsa glider loaded with 12 soldiers, a jeep and trailer carrying mortars and ammunition to the drop zone near Arnhem. There was very little enemy opposition on the opening day of Operation Market Garden and his aircraft returned safely to Fairford at 15.30 hrs.



*Short Stirling towing a horsa Glider at RAF Fairford*

On the day of invasion, thousands of allied aircraft converged near London before making their way across the English Channel to Holland. The stream of bombers, gliders, transport planes and fighter escorts stretched for over 150 km and was 5 km wide. It must have been quite a sight.

The objective of the soldiers in the horsa glider was to move quickly after landing to capture the bridge over the lower Rhine River at Arnhem. The landing zone was nearly 12 km west of the bridge and fierce fighting over subsequent days meant these troops never got to Arnhem but were surrounded by well organised German panzer tanks at the village of Oosterbeek.



*British airspeed horsa glider landing at the drop zone near Arnhem*

Over the succeeding days Maurice and his crew flew missions to drop supplies to allied troops on the ground near Arnhem. Sadly, because of the intense house-to-house fighting and the rapidly shrinking British perimeter compounded by poor radio communications most of these supplies fell into enemy hands.





*A load of small supply crates dropped near Arnhem from a formation of RAF Short Stirling's on Tuesday 19th as flak explodes.*

The resupply flights into Arnhem were hampered for several days by cloud cover in England, which forced the postponement of follow-on drops, including Sosabowski's Polish paratroopers, leaving the British paratroopers at Arnhem especially short of water, ammunition, and much needed reinforcements

## Shot down and killed - 20 September 1944.

On the fourth day of the battle, Wednesday 20 September 1944, there was fierce fighting around the Arnhem Bridge and also further west around the village of Oosterbeek.

At 10am the crews at RAF Fairford attended a briefing for their next supply operation. By this time, news had been received that the initial target drop zone, (DZ- V) had fallen into enemy hands. The drops were therefore made to a new location at Oosterbeek within the shrinking British perimeter.



*British 1st Airborne soldiers using parachutes to signal to allied supply aircraft from the grounds of Division HQ at the Hartenstein Hotel in Oosterbeek, Netherlands, Sep 1944*

Later in the morning, it was decided to postpone the departure time at Fairford by two hours, so it was not until 1440 hrs that the first of seventeen aircraft from 620 squadron took off along the southern route to Holland. This new information about the delay in departure was not adequately communicated so planned fighter cover for the mission did not rendezvous as planned.

Maurice once again took off in his Short Stirling bomber, LK-548 (fuselage code QS-Y) with a crew of seven including two British army dispatchers from Fairford at 14.45 pm to resupply beleaguered British paratroopers on the ground at Oosterbeek that were being slowly encircled by German panzer tanks.

It never returned.

Official reports show that flying low (1500') and slow at about on the run into the drop zone the plane was hit by flak and incendiary bullets and the starboard aileron caught fire but the crew continued bravely on their mission.

An account by the flight engineer Sgt David Evans said *"As we approached Arnhem from the southerly direction the flak appeared much heavier than the previous day. Incendiary bullets tore into the trailing edge of the starboard edge and set it alight and from my position in the astrodome I could see the flames"*.

Later Sgt Evans said in his account *"minutes later I was momentarily blinded by dust as a cannon shell pierced the wooden frame of the astrodome within an inch of my nose. I was shocked that my position was straddled by cannon fire which made very neat holes about 18 inches apart in the floor of the compartment"* – attachment 12.



*German ground troops firing at low flying RAF supply aircraft*

After successfully dropping their supplies and banking out to return to England the plane was once again hit, this time by an 88mm shell that went through the main petrol tank in the starboard wing but fortunately without exploding. But this was soon followed by a fountain of high octane fuel that became a roaring jet of fire as the wing and inside the fuselage was ablaze.



*A formidable weapon - German 88mm gun near Arnhem*

Struggling to maintain height, Maurice then gave the order to abandon the aircraft by which time the plane had dropped to about 800-1000' and three airmen (Evans, Gasgoyne and Hume) managed to parachute out. They sustained injuries from the jump with two being knocked

unconscious. They made their way back to England via Brussels with the help of the Dutch Resistance within a few days of the crash.

Significantly, it is reported by the navigator Flight Sergeant Hume, that Maurice refused a parachute that was offered to him and stayed valiantly with the controls of the stricken plane to allow others of his crew to escape.

Maurice continued to fly the burning plane towards home for another 50 km before crashing into a Dutch farm at Vorstenbosch. Maurice and the rest of the crew were killed.

On their return to England the three survivors made official witness statements. These are held in the Australian National Archives and confirm the story that Maurice refused a parachute when it was offered to him and stayed with the plane to allow his aircrew to bail out – attachment 1.

Two of the seventeen *Stirling's* from 620 squadron sent to Arnhem on 20 September failed to return and many others limped back seriously damaged.

By the evening of 20 September 1944, the Battle of the Arnhem Bridge was all but lost.

Of the 34000 British, American and Polish airborne troops landed in Operation Market Garden about half ended up being either killed, wounded or captured.

Maurice was one of 13 Australian airmen.

He was only 21 years old.

## Maurice's medals.

In 2004 I was surprised to discover that Maurice's war service medals had never been collected or sent to his family after the war. I subsequently wrote to the Directorate of Honours and Awards in Canberra and retrieved them as his surviving next of kin. Incredibly they had lain in dusty storage for nearly 60 years and they are now a treasured family possession. The ribbons have been replaced and the medals properly mounted and I took them to his grave in the Netherlands in 2014.



*1939-45 Star, France & Germany Star, Defence Medal, War Medal  
1939-45, Australian Service Medal. 2*

*2 - In 2012 the British Government introduced a Bomber Command Clasp to go with the 1939-45 star. Disappointingly, I learned that Maurice is*

*ineligible for the clasp because 620 Squadron was deemed a transport squadron part of 38 group during the period of his service.*



## Finding out what happened.

I have discovered a great deal about my uncle during the last few years from the internet as official WW2 documents have become progressively scanned and made available online.

Like many families during the war it created a great deal of anguish not knowing exactly what happened to their son in a country so far away from home.

The major breakthrough came in early 2014 when I was able to track down the coordinates of the crash site using a German internet page cataloguing lost WW2 aircraft.

<http://www.lostaircraft.com/database.php?e=30119&mode=viewentry>



*The red dot at the centre of the map is near the location of the crash.*

I subsequently learned from local amateur historians in Holland and the archived documents that his aircraft was hit by flak and caught fire and crashed 7pm (local time) in a field in front of the house of Mr Verhoeven, Meuwelweg 3, near Vorstenbosch.

I wrote a "cold letter" in July 2014 to the address that I had identified off the internet map with a copy translated into Dutch. I didn't really expect a reply but to my amazement I was called at home in Australia about two weeks later by the owner Mr William van der Donk.

Mr van der Donk told me how the internet map was slightly incorrect and that the real crash site was just around the corner from his home. He also told me how he and the people in nearby village of Vorstenbosch knew all about Maurice and that

there were even some eye witnesses from the Verhoeven family that lived in the house in 1944 that were still alive that would love to meet me.

William sent me two Dutch newspaper articles and photos from December 1977 that the Verhoeven family had kept from when the wreckage was recovered from their farm. The field was being levelled for agricultural purposes and the Royal Dutch Air Force had been called to dispose of some remaining unexploded ordinance and they took the bent propeller to the local airbase Volkel.



*December 1977 – One of the Dutch newspaper articles about the recovery of wreckage - The women with the head scarf is Mrs Door Verhoeven who witnessed the plane crash along with her children – attachment 13.*



*Recovery of wreckage by Dutch authorities and disposal of unexploded ordinance – December 1977*

## The records.

There were eight men on board the Short Stirling Bomber aircraft when it left RAF Fairford in England at 14.45pm on 20 September 1944 for another resupply mission to Arnhem.

It failed to return and they were listed as missing.

Five men were killed in the crash around 7 pm local time near the small Dutch village of Vorstenbosch including:

1. Pilot Officer, **Maurice McHugh**
2. Wireless Operator - Flight Sergeant, **Eric Arthur Bradshaw** (pictured)
3. Rear Gunner- Sergeant, **Thomas Vickers**,
4. Dispatcher - Lance Corporal, **John Waring**
5. Dispatcher – Driver, **Ernest Victor Heckford**.

Those killed were initially buried in the Nistelrode General Cemetery but were reinterred in a communal grave at the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery after the war in 1949. Maurice was the only Australian on-board the aircraft and all others were British.

Three men parachuted out safely and evaded capture including:

1. Navigator - Flight Sergeant, **John (Jock) Hume**.
2. Flight Engineer – Sergeant, **David Evans** (pictured).
3. Bomb Aimer - Flight Sergeant, **Nicholas Gasgoyne**.

The plane crashed in occupied enemy territory and the German troops searched for the parachutists.

The local Dutch resistance hid the injured airmen in a local church.



*Eric Bradshaw and David Evans*

The three men who managed to parachute out evaded capture with the help of the local Dutch resistance and returned to England via Brussels only a few days later and made official statements on Sunday 24 September 1944 at their home base at RAF Fairford .

Copies of the original statements made by the three survivors are held in the Australian National Archives (ref A705, 166/26/594) – attachment 1.

Also, a collated summary from the Australian War Memorial is below.

*Sgt Evans, Flight Sergeant Hume and Flight Sergeant Gasgoyne evaded capture.*

*In a report Flight Sergeant Hume stated: "I was the first to bail out at approx. 1000 feet. My chute opened and I saw the aircraft strike the ground at a 45 degree angle. I saw two other chutes in the air, and Dutch eye witnesses said only three chutes were seen. "Pilot Officer McHugh refused a chute which was offered to him."*

*Flight Sergeant Evans in his report stated: "I was the Flight Engineer on Stirling LK548 on an operational flight to Arnhem. On the appropriate drop zone intense ack-ack was encountered at a height of about 1500 feet. The starboard aileron was set alight, but Pilot Officer McHugh kept a straight course and did his utmost to drop the supplies in the correct area and was successful. During the whole time there was intense flak. After dropping the supplies, the Captain put the aircraft into a climb turning back at the same time. The aileron was still burning, and as soon as the*



*aircraft had turned around, the petrol tank immediately forward of the aileron received a direct hit, and the whole wing tip burst into flames. I advised Pilot Officer McHugh as to the condition of the aircraft, and he gave the abandon order. I put on a chute and took off my helmet. By now the whole starboard wing was alight, also the centre section, and the Captain was struggling hard to maintain height which was impossible. I was the second to leave the aircraft, and as I jumped I heard several explosions. The Navigator was first out and I followed, then the Air Bomber. I was knocked unconscious by the opening of the chute, and did not see the aircraft crash. I landed about 3 miles North of Uden, and met the other two. I believe the other three were in the aircraft when it crashed."*

Ref: Storr, Allan (ed.). (2006). Page 260.

[http://www.awm.gov.au/catalogue/research\\_centre/pdf/rc09125z008\\_1.pdf](http://www.awm.gov.au/catalogue/research_centre/pdf/rc09125z008_1.pdf).

Furthermore, in his book *"Stirling's in Action with Airborne Forces"* by Dennis Williams published in 2008, the flight engineer, Sergeant David Evans gives a slightly more detailed account of what happened on 20 September 1944 and of his subsequent escape back to England with the other airmen. Importantly, even after the passage of 64 years it is consistent with his original 1944 statement – attachment 12.

According to Sgt Evans' family the injuries he sustained when parachuting out of the plane was the end of his war service in the RAF. He remained very proud of his contribution and he visited Holland and the crash site several times after the war but sadly died in 2014.

The Australian National Archives also show that the McHugh family received a number of letters and telegrams from authorities advising of the crash but did not confirm if Maurice was dead for some time – attachments.

Because Maurice was shot down behind enemy lines he was initially listed as missing.

However, one of the survivors of the crash, the Bomb Aimer, Nick Gascoyne deserves a special mention. He wrote to the family soon after the crash and told of what happened. Sadly this letter

is missing but the contents of his letter were quoted when my grandmother Annie May McHugh wrote to the Air Force on 6 May 1945 trying to find out what happened to Maurice. She uses the words from Nick Gascoyne's letter - *"Maurice made his turn with the calm assurance of a veteran and we dropped our load accurately but on coming out were hit in several places and caught fire. The fire was pretty fierce and we had no hope of putting it out so the order to abandon the aircraft, in the same steady voice was given. Three of the crew managed to make it – myself being the last one. I'm sorry to say that Maurice in his attempt to keep the plane in the air until the remainder were out stayed with it till it hit the ground. I'm afraid that Maurice died struggling to gain control of the plane"* – attachment 7.

In February 1945 some further details of the crash were made available to the family from the air force including part of the statement for the navigator, Flight Sergeant Hume's that Maurice *"refused a parachute which was offered to him"* - attachment 4.

Sadly, it took nearly nine more months of uncertainty until 15 June 1945 for the family to receive official confirmation that Maurice was presumed dead – attachment 9.

Later in March 1950 the family received official advice that Maurice had been reburied at Canadian War Cemetery at Groesbeek on the Dutch/German border – attachment 11.



Nick and Dorothy Gascoyne - wedding 1943



Plaque in Arnhem. - Presented by 23 Squadron (City of Brisbane) in 1998

Nick Gascoyne kept in touch with the family after the war and in one of his final letters to the family in 1999 he wrote that Maurice *"chose to stay with the plane to ensure that it did not come down in an area inhabited by civilian innocents"*.

A brass plaque with Maurice's name along with other RAAF airmen killed during Operation Market Garden is mounted in the cafe area of the Hartenstein Hotel at Oosterbeek which houses the Airborne Museum. This was the HQ of the British paratroops during the battle.

## Planning my visit the Netherlands – 2014.

After uncovering all this new information about Maurice from the internet I wrote to the Australian Foreign Minister, The Hon. Julie Bishop in July 2014 to find out if Australia was being represented at the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations in the Netherlands in September 2014.

I firmly believed that Australia should be recognised for its small but significant contribution. I also expected that the governments of Britain, America, Netherlands and Poland would have official representations. I also imagined a large number of veterans and their families would also make the pilgrimage because many were ~~now aged well~~ into their 90's and this would most likely be their last visit.

I eventually received a reply in late August 2014 from the Minister for Veterans Affairs via my local Federal Member of Parliament, Darren Chester, supporting my trip by giving me the contact details for the Australian Defence attaché in London, Brigadier Bill Sowry. Darren also gave me an Australian flag to take with me on my trip that I later gave to the school in Vorstenbosch.

I immediately made email contact with Bill Sowry and he advised that he had already seen my correspondence to the Minister as well as visited the crash site to make contact with the current owners of the house and some of the eye witnesses. He offered to arrange a small gathering and service with a few people on Friday 19 September (one day short of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary). After a bit of detective work he also arranged access to the local Dutch Airbase Volkel to look at the small museum that housed some of the wreckage.

Knowing I was meeting the owners of the land where the plane crashed I had a brass commemoration plaque made up at home in Australia to take with me. I hoped that it could be mounted nearby the crash site.

I was also pleased to learn that Brigadier Bill Sowry had been invited to attend the official commemorations in Arnhem. I thought it important that Australia be represented and that an Australian military uniform be visible. At the time of my travel the relations between Australia and the Netherlands were particularly strong over the recovery of the wreckage a Malaysian airline (MH17) that had been shot over the Ukraine only a month or so earlier by Russian separatists. This incident had created international outrage and many Dutch and Australian passengers had been killed. Bill had been heavily involved in coordinating the international recovery program.

Meanwhile through a colleague at work I made contact with Nick McCallum from Channel 7 news in Melbourne who wanted to do a story on my visit to Holland and Maurice. Nick came to my Traralgon office a week before I departed and a story was aired on the national TV news that evening.

While all this trip planning was going on I also tracked down an address for Maurice's girlfriend in 1941, Dumell MacDonald, who was 90 years old and lived in Queensland. We had several telephone conversations and she sent me some old photos she had kept.

## 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary commemorations – September 2014.

For convenience of travel I signed up with a British tour group for the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations at Arnhem and met a number of original veterans and their families.



*A British veteran of Operation Market Garden, Arthur Bailey, 6th Airborne at the Arnhem Bridge - "A Bridge Too Far."*

The people I met on the tour were wonderful and very interested and surprised about the Australian connection to Operation Market Garden.



*The Scottish paras on the tour at the Arnhem Bridge*

Nick McCallum from Channel 7 news also made a special trip over from Australia to Holland to cover Maurice's story. We met in Amsterdam and went to both Groesbeek and Vorstenbosch together.



*A large convoy of historic military vehicles at the Grave Bridge converging on Arnhem for the 70th anniversary commemorations. – Sept 2014*



*The Grave Bridge over the Maas River in 1944 captured by the American 82nd Airborne Division*



*Parachute jump re-enactment at near Arnhem - Sept 2014*



## Visit to Groesbeek – Thursday 18 September 2014

On Thursday 18 September I visited Maurice's grave at the Canadian War Cemetery at Groesbeek in the eastern Netherlands near the German border. I took his medals and his wings and left a small Australian flag. The magnificently maintained cemetery looks over the peaceful Dutch countryside and contains over 3500 graves of mainly Canadian and British soldiers.



*Maurice's grave at Groesbeek with his medals, wings and a small Australian flag*

After the war in 1949 Maurice's body was reinterred from Nistelrode and I believe that he is the only Australian airmen buried at Groesbeek. He is buried in a communal grave alongside his aircrew, Eric Bradshaw, Thomas Vickers and John Waring. One of the army dispatchers, Earnest Heckford's body was never found and he is commemorated on the memorial panel. There were local some stories in Vorstenbosch of another body dressed in a khaki uniform being found 200m from the crash site but there are no official records to substantiate this.

While being obviously focused on my uncle Maurice it was also sobering to reflect that each one of these graves has a family and a story.



*Maurice is buried in a communal grave at Groesbeek alongside the other airmen from the plane. Grave XII. C. 9-12.*

## Visit to Vorstenbosch – Friday 19 September 2014.

Friday 19 September (one day short of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the crash of Maurice's plane) was one that changed my life and one I will remember forever.

I was picked up at the Airborne Museum "Hartenstein Hotel" in Oosterbeek by the Australian defence attaché, Brigadier Bill Sowry. He had flown over from London especially to take me to Vorstenbosch and lead a small service.



*The British divisional HQ at the Hartenstein Hotel in Oosterbeek as it is today. This was the intended drop target for Maurice on the 20 September 1944 - the day he was shot down*

I was expecting to meet about 6-8 people but was shocked when about 50 or so turned up. Most of the small village of Vorstenbosch including the Deputy Mayor, Rien Wijdeven and the commander of the local Dutch air force base, Chief Warrant Officer Gerard Veenhuis were there to greet me.



*A large group had gathered to meet me*



## Now to the eye witnesses.

Prior to my visit I understood there were only two surviving eye witnesses **to the crash of Maurice's plane** in 1944 but it turned out there were more I didn't know about....

## The Verhoeven family.

Sisters Betsie (age 75), Miet (age 80), Mien (aged 79) and Tonnie (age 77) were young girls at the time on the 20 September 1944 and told me how they were out doing laundry with their mother (Theodora). The laundry was laid out to whiten in what they termed a "bleachfield" and they all watched mesmerised as the burning plane approached their house from the north at about 30 metres above the ground with its left wing on fire. They said the plane was flying very low, made a turn then crashed down in the field near the house. Their father Bertus was in the farm building feeding the animals at the time.



*Betsie, Toon, Miet Verhoeven (2014)*



*Verhoeven family (circa 1961)*

I was also told by, Toon (age 82), how he ran to the burning wreckage with his mother (Theodora or Door) to try rescue my uncle and the crew but also had to withdraw because of the heat and exploding ammunition.



*Painting of the Verhoeven family home at Meuwelweg 3*

As a result of the crash, cracks appeared in the walls of the Verhoeven farmhouse and several windows were broken. The insurance company subsequently paid 1400 guiders to compensate for the damage.

The Verhoeven family were also present when the wreckage was recovered in 1977. They gave me copies of the newspaper articles from the time.

Later, while in Oosterbeek on Sunday morning attending an outdoor church service at the Airborne Cemetery, Betsie and her son, Marcel Steenbeck made a special trip to present me with a large gear wheel from Maurice's plane that Marcel had recovered from the buried wreckage in 1977.



*Local school children from Oosterbeek lay flowers at each grave at the airborne cemetery every September.*



*With Betsie and her son Marcel at the airborne cemetery Oosterbeek (2014)*

The Verhoeven family sat down after my visit to discuss what they recalled and produced a combined witness statement - attachment 15.

## The Smolenaer brothers.

The Smolenaer brothers, Jan (age 83) and Toin (age 82) were also eye witnesses and told me how they were working the field as young boys with their stepfather digging potatoes and saw the plane crash only a few hundred meters from where they were standing. They ran to the crashed

plane but had to lie in a ditch for over an hour while the wreckage burned and the ammunition exploded. They said that German troops chased them away as they searched for the three airmen that had parachuted out.



*Toin and Jan Smolenaer (circa 1943)*

Significantly, from their vantage point they saw Maurice in the cockpit as he pulled back on the controls of the plane and it skipped over the Verhoeven house, lost airspeed and crashed into the field about 100m on the other side.

They also believe that Maurice was possibly trying to "bellyland" the burning aircraft into the field.

They were both adamant it was a very brave thing to do and that if the plane had hit the house it would have almost certainly killed the entire Verhoeven family of seven.

This account by the two Smolenaer brothers of the aircraft pulling up at the last minute to avoid the Verhoeven house and then hitting the ground hard and catching fire is consistent with the 1944 statement of the navigator, Jock Hume, who said that after he parachuted out he "saw the aircraft hit the ground at an angle of forty-five degrees. It immediately burst into flames" - attachment 1.



*With Toin and Jan Smolenaer (2014)*

Like the Verhoeven family the two Smolenaer bothers sat down together after my visit and made a written statement of where they were standing and what they witnessed - attachment 16.



*The Smolenaer family (Jan and Toin – front)*



## The village windmill.

I was very moved because I was told that Maurice and the other airmen have been "adopted" by the village of Vorstenbosch. Jan Smolenaar who witnessed the crash as a young boy is the custodian of the historic windmill and puts it into a special "mourning position" each year in September as a tribute all the airmen. I was told it's an old village custom when someone dies in the town.



*Sculpture of the miller outside Vorstenbosch windmill – A tribute to Toin and Jan Smolenaar's father was killed in the 1930's.*

The village windmill is very special to the Smolenaar brothers because their father was hit by the windmill and killed in the 1930's and the bronze sculpture at the front is in honour of him.



*Vorstenbosch village windmill – circa 1945*



**Molen "Windlust" in de rouw**

*Vorstenbosch village windmill in the "mourning position" September 2014*



## Local school children.

The local school children arrived on their bikes with their teacher to meet me and present me a very special gift. It was a book of small paintings they had done in class on the war and what it meant to be free. I gave them an Australian flag that I had been given by my local MP Darren Chester together with a picture of Maurice that will now take pride of place in the school.

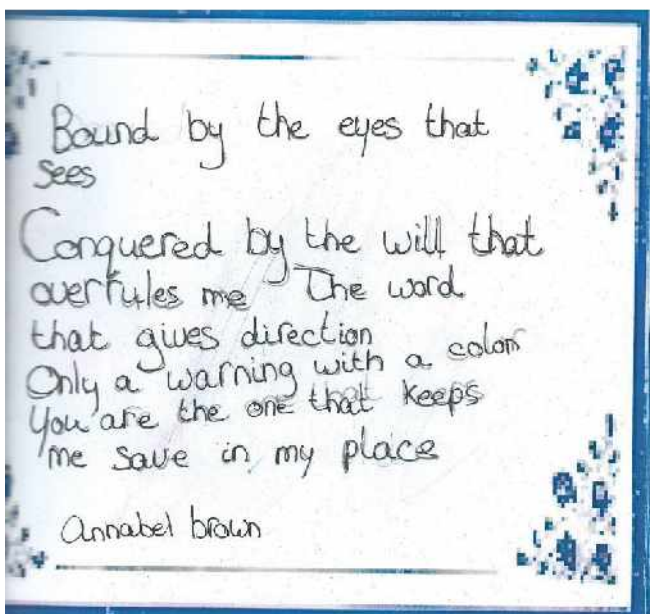
The children kept referring to my uncle and the other the airmen as their "liberators". It's very significant to them and they all knew about it and wanted to meet me and thank me. I was told by their teacher that Maurice and the other airmen had been "adopted" by the school and they study them each year.



*Some of the drawings done by the school children*



*With the local school children, their teacher, the Deputy Mayor, commander of the Dutch airbase and Brigadier Bill Sowry.*



## The ice-skates.

In a quiet moment, the commander of the Dutch Air Force, Chief Warrant Officer Gerard Veenhuis introduced me to Ties van der Heijden (age 78). Ties asked if I would like some pieces of Maurice's aeroplane. I was "gobsmacked" to think that some still existed. The pieces of aluminium he gave me are parts of the wing struts of Maurice's plane. They were cut into children's skates by his father in the winter of 1944-45 and he used them as a child.

I was deeply moved by this generous gift and the thought that amid all the destruction of war and of all the possible uses that valuable metal could be



put to around a farm that his father chose to make some of it into ice skates for kids to have some fun.

Significantly the winter of 1944-45 was known as the "hungry winter" in Holland. Over 20000 people starved to death after the German troops retreated and took everything with them and flooded farmland to stop the allied advance so people were unable to grow food and were reduced to eating tulip bulbs.



*Ties van der Heijden with the ice-skates his father made him in 1945*

## Sister Emmanuel.

One of the people I met in Vorstenbosch was from the local church and she told me about Sister Emmanuel who with some other nuns took the bodies of Maurice and the other airmen from the smouldering wreckage to be buried at a small nearby town called Nistelrode. It's nice to think they were laid to rest by the nuns who would have said a prayer for them. They did this only a few hours after the plane crashed. The Smolenaar brothers and Verhoeven family saw this happen

and confirmed this story with me. They also said it would have been a very dangerous thing to do in September 1944. The area was occupied by German soldiers looking for the three airmen that had parachuted out and who were being hidden by the Dutch resistance in a nearby church. There was also a strict night curfew in place. Sister Emmanuel looks pretty formidable ... I certainly wouldn't tangle with her ... so I suppose the German soldiers gave her a wide berth too.



*Sister Emmanuel taken in January 1972. Posing as she would have appeared on her bike in 1944.*

## The Dutch Resistance.

I was introduced to Professor Harry van Kessel. It turned out he was a classmate of Jan Smolenaar. His father, Bert was the manager of a local cooperative mill and sexton of the St Lambertus church and was responsible for maintenance of its buildings and the surrounding graveyard so he had an exemption from the 24 hour curfew.



*Professor Harry Van Kessel whose father Bert was in the Dutch resistance (left) with Toin Smolenaar (right).*



*Bert van Kessel with his wife and family after the war.  
Harry, the eldest son standing in the middle.*

Harry said his father Bert van Kessel was part of the Dutch resistance that hid navigator Flt Sgt Jock Hume and the bomb aimer Flt Sgt Nicholas Gascoyne in the church from the Germans. Bert brought them food during their stay and helped arranged for them to be smuggled back to England via Brussels.

The airmen were attended by doctors while at the church.

By this stage, collaborators were being rounded up from the area by the Dutch resistance and held at the church. Their fate is unknown.



*St. Lambertus church in Vorstenbosch was built in 1932 and was where the allied airmen were hidden.*

Harry said he remembers the airmen as a boy and showed me some falsified identity papers. The papers were all in Dutch and impossible for me to read and he spoke little English.



*Professor Harry van Kessel pointing to the hiding space in the roof of the St. Lambertus church tower where airmen Gascoyne and Hume were hidden in September 1944. The room houses the bellows for the church organ.*

Meanwhile, the flight engineer, Sgt David Evans was rescued by the van Hintum family near Nistelrode after he parachuted out. He had been knocked unconscious and injured in the jump. He was taken next day on the back of a motorbike to St Lambertus church in Vorstenbosch to join up with his colleagues before returning to England - attachment 12.



*The van Hintum family from Nistelrode were involved in the rescue of the flight engineer, Sgt David Evans and his transport to Vorstenbosch – attachment 12.*



## Laying a poppy wreath and presenting a plaque.

The Australian defence attaché, Bill Sowry was fantastic and looked splendid in his brigadier's uniform. Bill said the airmen's prayer and the ode (see inset) as we laid a poppy wreath.

Hugh Brodie was educated at Melbourne High School, and then the University of Melbourne, where he gained a B.A. (Hons). Prior to World War II he taught at Sale High School and then Melbourne High School. He joined the RAAF in September 1940, and was sent to Britain, where he trained as a navigator. He was posted to 460 Squadron RAAF in February 1942 but was subsequently killed whilst on operations near Dusseldorf on 3 June, 1942. His poem 'An Airman's Prayer' was found among his personal effects after his death.

*Almighty and all-present Power,  
Short is the prayer I make to Thee,  
I do not ask in battle hour  
For any shield to cover me.  
The vast unalterable way  
From which the stars do not depart  
May not be turned aside to stay  
The bullet flying to my heart.  
I ask no help to strike my foe,  
I seek no petty victory here,  
The enemy I hate, I know  
To Thee is also dear.  
But this I pray, be at my side  
When death is drawing through the sky,  
Almighty God, who also died  
Teach me the way that I should die.*

*The ode:*

*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old;  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning  
We will remember them.*

(Audience responds) *We will remember them.*



*A small ceremony at the crash site with the Deputy Mayor, Rien Wijdeven and Bill Sowry near the crash site*



*With Brigadier Bill Sowry - Australian defence attaché from London - overlooking crash site*

The Deputy Mayor laid flowers on behalf of the community.

Purely by coincidence a WW2 Dakota bomber flew overhead as we held the small ceremony at the edge of the field. The aircraft was in Arnhem for the 70th anniversary commemorations and was practicing parachute drops. A perfect segue.



*Laura van Herpen - from the local municipality of Bernheze*

The brass plaque I brought with me from Australia was taken on the day by the local Deputy Mayor, Rien Wijdeven. He was thrilled and said that the occasion had put Vorstenbosch on the map – attachment 18.

The community subsequently held a special ceremony on 10 December 2014 to mount the plaque on the wall of the council chambers.

The Mayor, Marieke Moorman also wrote a letter of support to the Australian Government for Maurice to be considered for a posthumous bravery award - attachment 17.



*Jan Smolenaar with Deputy Mayor Rien Wijdeven – 10 December 2014*

The actions of the council clearly serve to highlight that the bravery of allied airmen in WW2 is still very significant to people in the Netherlands and the crash site of Maurice's plane is especially important to the community of Vorstenbosch.



*School children with the Deputy Mayor and the Australian flag I gave the school.*



*Special meeting at Vorstenbosch - 10 December 2014*





*Jan Smolenaer with the Marieke Moorman, Burgemeester (Mayor) of municipality Bernheze at the special ceremony to mount the plaque I left in Holland*

## Other local people I met.

There were a considerable number of people that facilitated my visit to Vorstenbosch.

Apart from those I have already acknowledged Mr William van der Donk warrants a special mention. I made initial contact with him with the "cold letter" sent to his address in July 2014 understanding it to be the crash site. He rang me in Australia a few weeks later and became my first key contact. It was the breakthrough I needed. It turned out his house was wrongly identified in the German internet webpage as the location of the crash but he helped me identify the correct location and arranged the community meeting.



*With William Van Der Donk, Miet Verhoeven, Gerard Veenhuis.*

Mrs Katja Sanderse and her family now own the house at Meulwelweg number 3 where my uncle's plane crashed. The old Verhoeven house which was built in 1931 has since been demolished and a new home built on the site.

Katja helped arranged the school children's visit and made her home available for the afternoon tea with the local community. Her kitchen window overlooks the crash site and I gave her a photo of Maurice.



*Katja Sanderse and Brigadier Bill Sowry (highly decorated for his role in East Timor)*



*With Katja's children*



*Afternoon tea at Katja's house*

The current owner of the farmland where the plane crashed is Mr Jan Timmermans. He told me he appreciates the significance of the site as a local war memorial.



*Betsie and Toon Verhoeven with the current owner of the land where the plane crashed - Mr Jan Timmermans (Centre)*



## Airbase Volkel – Typhoon Museum.

Later in the day, Chief Warrant Officer Gerard Veenhuis escorted me to the Royal Dutch Air Force base at Volkel which is nearby to view some of the wreckage from Maurice's plane. The airbase houses the small typhoon museum which is run by volunteers.

About a dozen people from the village came too.

After signing through security at the gate we were greeted by a squad of Dutch airmen standing to attention and saluting outside the front of museum.

Of over 6000 aircraft shot down in Holland in the war they have the bent propeller and other pieces of the wreckage from his plane on display. They were recovered in 1977 when the farmland at the crash site was being levelled.



*Display panel at Typhoon Museum about the crash. A small painting (top right) was given to the museum by Sergeant Evans in the 1980's*

I also learned that flight engineer, Sgt David Evans, one of the airmen that parachuted out of the plane, had been a regular visitor to the museum up to the 1980's and provided some of the

material for the display panel in the museum including commissioning a painting of the a Short Stirling bomber.



*Survival mirror – LK548*



*A bent propeller blade from Maurice's Short Stirling Bomber*

The museum curator, Peter Truren presented me with a very special gift. It was part of the main ring bearing from the engine of Maurice's Short Stirling Bomber. The museum had polished it up and mounted it in a wooden box. In return I gave the museum a photo of Maurice to put with the propeller and the display panel.



*Being presented with the main propeller engine bearing from Maurice's plane by Peter Truren.*



*Part of the main propeller bearing*

The museum curator also gave me several folders of key documents relating to the crash of my uncles plane. Many I had not seen before including:

- Photos of other parts of the plane that have since been recovered
- Copies of telegrams to my family in Australia about Maurice (also available on the national archives)
- A letter from my grandmother Annie May McHugh (dated 6 May 1945) seeking information about her son.
- Correspondence about the recovery of the bodies and reinterment to Groesbeck in 1949.

The day ended in the **officer's** mess for some nice cold Dutch beer and hot Dutch food.



## The media coverage.

Nick McCallum from Channel 7 news in Melbourne had already made a story about Maurice and my pilgrimage before I left for Holland.

He went on to make a special trip to Holland to follow the story and arrived in Amsterdam on Thursday afternoon 18 September and left on Friday night.

He produced two stories which were aired on national TV in Australia, one on the Saturday night news and another for the "Sunday Program" to mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the crash – attachment DVD 18.

<https://au.tv.yahoo.com/sunrise/video/watch/25086303/remembering-an-aussie-hero/>

Two local Dutch newspapers also covered my visit – attachment 14.



One of the three local newspaper articles

## Postscript.

The story of my uncle Maurice continued to generate some interest even after I returned to Australia.

Amongst the people who made contact with me was a favourite secondary school teacher of mine, Ralph Sinclair, who I hadn't seen for almost 40 years but he had seen the story on channel 7 news.



*My old school teacher - Ralph Sinclair*

I also had a phone call at work from Joyce Sherratt from Melbourne. She heard the story on radio 3AW, where Nick McCullum is an announcer. She is 91 years old and told me how she had gone to Preston Primary School with Maurice and she had later been his girlfriend. She sent me copies of letters he had written to her while he was training in Adelaide. We met for lunch and I was delighted with her warmth and generosity.



*South Preston State School - grade 5 - 1933.*

*(Maurice front row third from left with Joyce Sherratt (centre - white dress))*



*With Joyce Sherratt and my cousins David and Michael Hedger - Feb 2015*

After I returned from Holland I was contacted by email by Nick Thomson who is Sgt David Evans grandson. He told me that David Evans had been to Holland several times after the war to revisit the crash site but sadly died in 2014. Nick sent me some photos, documents and log books.

Amongst his grandfather's things Nick found a silk blouse that had been made from his salvaged parachute by one of the women in Holland who saw the plane crash. It was a gift to Sgt Evans in June 1964 when he returned to Holland.



*Silk blouse made from Sgt David Evans parachute.*

## Time for reflection.

My father, John McHugh, was Maurice's younger brother. He was also a RAAF pilot and died in 1971 when I was only young.

My fathers need for closure about what happened Maurice in Holland has probably been the main motivation for my perseverance over the years to uncover his story.

At the outset I knew very little other than some sketchy family recollections and what was available at the Australian War Memorial. My grandparents are no longer alive and most of the key letters sent to the family have been lost.

Access to the historical documents on the Australian National Archives and other information internet together supported by those with an interest in the subject has enabled me to fill out many of the details of what happened to Maurice.

Discovering that Maurice refused a parachute and continued to fly the burning plane to allow his mates to parachute to safety was an unimaginably brave thing for him to have done. He was only 21 year old.

But it's the human stories I have found most touching. I was overwhelmed with the response of the townsfolk of Vorstenbosch to my visit.

Meeting the surviving eye witnesses, the Verhoeven family and the Smolenaer brothers was particularly special. Listening to their chilling stories, that as young children they witnessed Maurice pull back on the controls of his plane at the last minute to avoid hitting their home then lose airspeed and crash into the ground in a ball of flame had been very traumatic for them. The Verhoeven family are convinced they are alive today because of his actions and wanted to personally thank me for his bravery and sacrifice.

It became clear to me during my day at Vorstenbosch and even more apparent in the weeks after that Operation Market Garden in 1944 is incredibly significant to the Dutch people and is part of their modern cultural identity. It marked

their liberation after four harsh years of German occupation during WW2.

The crash site and the actions of the Maurice remain relevant to this day and represent an important touchstone for the community. They have commemorated these events for many years and value its significance as a local war memorial as evidenced by the village windmill being put in the mourning position as a tribute in September.

The wonderful drawings done especially for me by the local school children are a testament to the significance they place on their freedom. I'm very pleased that the Australian flag and photo of Maurice I gave now takes pride of place in their classroom.

More importantly, my visit created a human connection and a unique link to Australia for the local community. For the people of Vorstenbosch, Maurice is now no longer just foreign airmen that came from the other side of the world and died trying to free them but he became a person, with a family and a face.

Significantly, the local municipality responded by mounting the commemorative plaque in their council chambers and wrote a letter of support for a posthumous bravery award for Maurice.

The bent propeller in the Typhoon Museum was amazing to see and touch and the pieces of Maurice's plane I brought back home including the engine parts and ice skates I will treasure.

The national TV coverage exposed this story to so many people and I am very grateful to Nick McCallum from Channel 7 for his sensitive and professional handling of the material about Maurice.

Contacting Maurice's two sprightly girlfriends Dumell and Joyce who are now aged in their 90's here in Australia topped it all off.

There were so many wonderful people I met on my journey of discovery. I never imagined when I started that his story would be so rich and one that just keeps on giving.

## So now what?

I plan to write the Australian Government seeking a review of the case for a posthumous bravery award for my uncle Maurice.

The main reasons I believe that my uncle warrants reconsideration for a bravery award are:

1. Maurice and the crew continued to bravely fly their Short Stirling Bomber on its supply mission into Oosterbeek even after it was hit by flak and on fire.
2. On banking out to return to England the plane was again hit by flak and the wing and fuselage exploded into flame and Maurice ordered the crew to abandon the stricken aircraft.
3. Significantly, Maurice refused a parachute that was offered to him by the navigator Flt Sgt John Hume to allow others of the aircrew to escape the burning aircraft.
4. Maurice stayed at the controls of the stricken plane flying for a further 50 km to the south before crashing in a Dutch farm at Vorstenbosch.
5. Eye witness accounts tell that Maurice deliberately pulled back on the controls at the last minute while trying to land, lost airspeed and crashed heavily into a field bursting into flame. His actions to avoid hitting the Verhoeven family home saved the lives of a family of seven people including five young children.
6. Maurice's actions and the crash site still have particular significance to the local community in Vorstenbosch as evidenced by my visit in 2014 and by the letter of support from the Mayor of the Municipality Bernheze.
7. Maurice was one of only 13 Australian airmen killed in Operation Market Garden and I believe that Australia's small but significant contribution to this historic WW2 battle deserves better recognition.
8. When considered alongside other feats of bravery that occurred such as Flight Lieutenant David Samuel Anthony Lord, Royal Air Force, who received the Victoria Cross in similar circumstances only a day before on 19 September 1944.



## Summary of key dates.

9 July 1923	Born in St Kilda. Son of Augustus and Annie May McHugh. Educated at South Preston Primary School and Northcote High school.
Circa 1941	Law Clerk – Rigby and Fielding, Melbourne.
26 October 1941	Joins Air Force Reserve.
27 February 1942	Joins RAAF (age 18 years 6 months).
27 February 1942	4 Initial Training School - Victor Harbour, South Australia.
25 June 1942	11 Elementary Flying Training School – Benalla, Victoria.
26 October 1942	6 Service Flying Training School - Mallala, South Australia.
5 February 1943	Graduates with "Wings" as Flight Sergeant.
6 March 1943	Embarked for England from Melbourne – arrives Halifax in April 1943.
April 1943 – 6 June 1944	Further flight training and conversion to Short Stirling Bomber and glider towing.
7 May 1945	Commissioned as Pilot Officer RAF.
6 June 1944	Posted to 620 squadron on D-Day – Part of Operation Tonga.
June – September	25 Special Operation Executive (SOE) missions into France, 620 squadron.
17 September 1944	Day 1, Sunday, Operation Market Garden, tow horsa glider into Arnhem from RAF Fairford.
19 September 1944	Day 3, Tuesday – Resupply mission to Arnhem.
20 September 1944	Day 4, Wednesday –Resupply mission to Oosterbeek, shot down by flak. Aircraft crashed at the Verhoeven farm at Vorstenbosch around 1700 hrs. Maurice and rest of the crew killed. Bodies taken to Nistelrode for burial.
20 -24 September 1944	Three airmen Hume, Gasgoyne and Evans make their way back to England with help of Dutch resistance.
23 September 1944	Telegram to McHugh family in Australia advising "Missing in Action".
24 September 1944	Airmen Hume, Gasgoyne and Evans make official statements at RAF Fairford.
Feb 1945 – June 1945	Various letters to and from air ministry trying to find out status of Maurice
1945	Letter from Flt Sgt Nick Gascoyne to McHugh family in Australia giving his account of the crash (letter missing).
6 May 1945	Letter from my grandmother, Annie May McHugh, to air ministry with reference to the first hand account from Flt Sgt Gascoyne.
15 June 1945	Letter of confirmation of Maurice's death.
30 March 1950	Advice that Maurice's body moved to Groesbeek war cemetery.
December 1977	Wreckage recovered from Verhoeven farm and parts taken to Airbase Volkel.

## Attachments.

1. Original statements from Gasgoyne, Evans and Hume – September 1944
2. Telegram to McHugh Family - 23 September - 1944
3. Letter – 12 February 1945
4. Letter – 21 February 1945
5. Letter – 4 April 1945
6. Letter – 10 April 1945
7. Letter from Annie May McHugh – 6 May 1945
8. Letter 17 May 1945
9. Letter - 15 June 1945
10. Letter – 8 April 1949
11. Letter - 30 March 1950
12. Account by the Flight Engineer, Sergeant Evans in Dennis Williams Book (1980)
13. Two articles from Dutch newspapers about recovery of wreckage in 1977
14. Three newspaper articles from my visit to Vorstenbosch in 2014
15. Statement from Verhoeven family – October 2014
16. Statement from Smolenaer brothers – November 2014
17. Letter of support Marieke Moorman, Mayor, Municipality of Bernheze
18. DVD – with three TV news stories done by Nick McCallum from channel 7 Melbourne:
  - Thursday, 4 September 2014 - evening news - before I departed for Holland.
  - Saturday, 20 September 2014 evening news - after meeting community at Vorstenbosch.
  - Sunday, 21 September 2014 - "Sunrise" program - longer version
19. The plaque

## Attachment 1 – Original airmen's statements 1944

O.C. 295 Squadron, R.A.F., RIVENHALL.

Fr 1139605 P/Sgt. Gascoyne, N.

Sir,

I beg to submit a report regarding my late crew's misfortune met at Holland on Sep. 20th, 1944 and on the presumed death of my late pilot - P/O McHugh.

We were hit in numerous places during the bombing run but managed to reach the target and drop our load as briefed. On the run out, the starboard wing caught fire and continued to blaze for several seconds but seemed to peter out. After a further few minutes of flying the fire broke out again - this time more fierce than before, and the order to abandon aircraft was given by the skipper. I, acting as Air Bomber of the crew was in the nose and immediately donned my chute and opened the escape hatch. By this time, the Navigator was hurrying down the steps leading to the nose, followed closely by the Flight Engineer. I stood by and watched them both go. Following them as soon as the exit was clear - I was the last member to leave.

On leaving the aircraft I was hit on the head and lost consciousness for several seconds before pulling my ripcord. Consequently I didn't witness what became of the aircraft after my hasty exit. The navigator however, watched it spin down to earth out of control in a blaze of flame. The remainder of the crew were still in it, so I can only surmise that they perished - they certainly did not bale out.

On recovering my senses after baling out I pulled my ripcord and sailed gently down to earth from approx. 800 ft. I discovered that I had landed about 6 miles N.N.E. of the village of UDON where I finally contacted both my Navigator and flight engineer. Here I had my head dressed by a Dutch doctor before proceeding to the Headquarters of the underground movement who organised our passage to Brussels and so back to England.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

Signed... N. Gascoyne P/Sgt.



COPY

STATEMENT MADE BY 2205525 P/SGT. EVANS, D.P. in respect of  
P/O M. McHUGH Aus/410858 - missing

I was Flight Engineer on Stirling aircraft No. IX.548 of 620 Squadron, which took off from R.A.F. Station Fairford on the afternoon of the 20th September 1944, on an operational flight to Arnhem. The captain of the aircraft was P/O M. McHUGH.

On approaching the dropping zone intense flak was encountered at the height of 1500'. The starboard aileron was set alight, but P/O McHUGH kept a straight course and did his utmost to drop the supplies in the correct area and was successful. During the whole of this time intense flak was encountered.

After dropping the supplies, the captain put the aircraft into a climb turning back at the same time. The aileron was still burning, and as soon as the aircraft had turned round, the petrol tank immediately forward of the aileron received a direct hit, and at the same time the whole wing tip burst into flame. I advised P/O McHUGH as to the condition of the aircraft, and he gave the order to abandon aircraft. I immediately put my parachute on and removed my helmet. By now the whole starboard wing was alight also the centre section, and P/O McHUGH was struggling hard trying to maintain height which was impossible. I was the second man to leave the aircraft, and as I jumped I heard several explosions. The navigator was the first out and I was followed by the bomb-aimer.

I was knocked unconscious by the opening of the parachute and did not witness the crashing of the aircraft. Later on I enquired among the Dutch inhabitants how many persons they had seen abandoning the aircraft, and was told that only three had been seen. I then enquired if it was possible to visit the scene of the crash but was told that it was in enemy territory.

I landed about three miles north of Uden, and I met the navigator and bomb-aimer at Uden. We made enquiries, and came to the conclusion that P/O McHUGH and the remainder of the crew were in the aircraft when it crashed.

Signed..... D.V. Evans, P/S.

Report on crash landing of a aircraft piloted by P/O. McHugh  
on 20th Sept. 1944.

I P/Sgt. Hume, was Navigator of the aircraft captained by P.O.  
McHugh which was shot down on the above date.

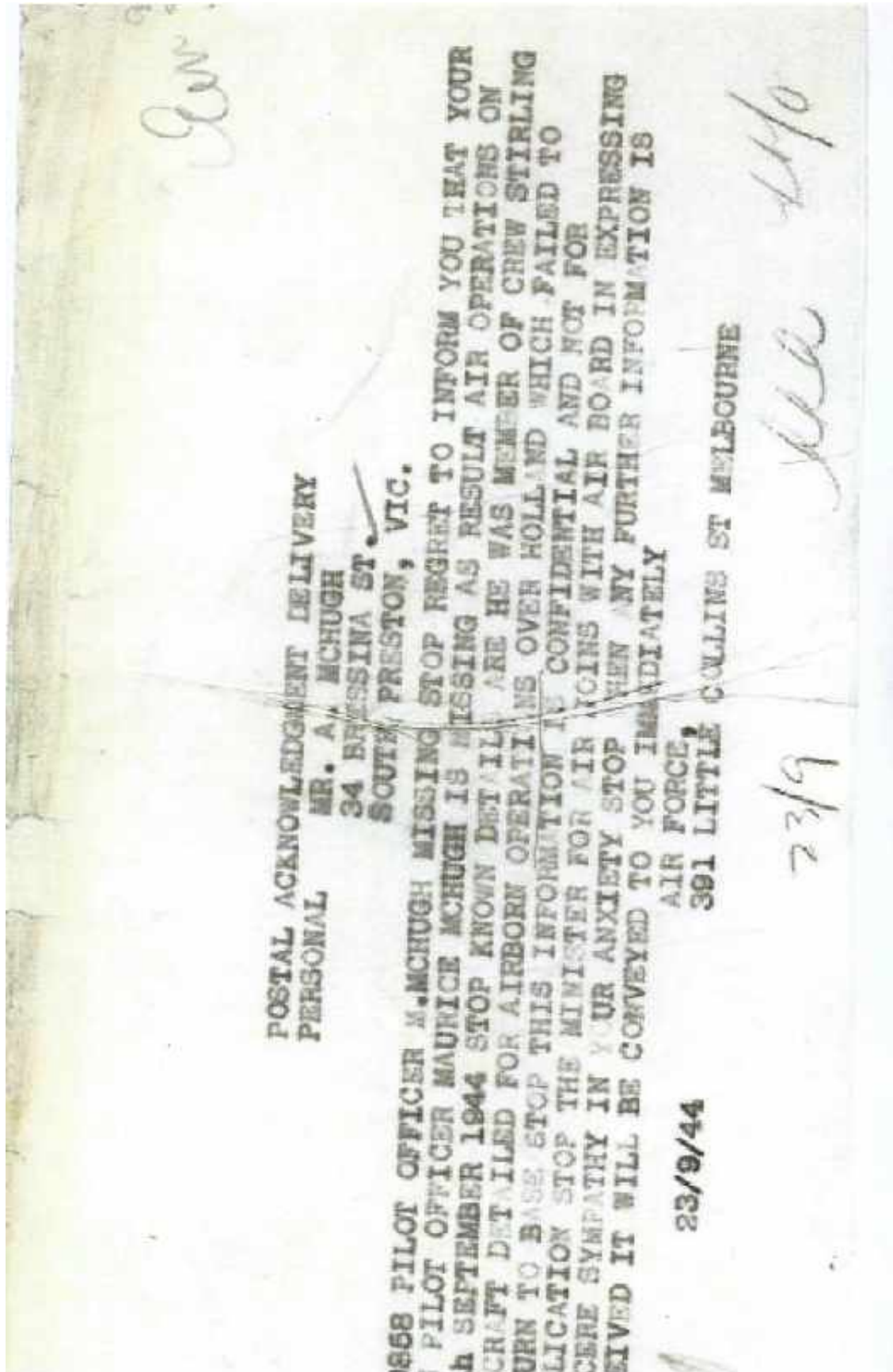
As we approached the target area we were hit by flak but as the aircraft was still under control we continued with the run-up and dropped our load. On leaving the target we were once again hit and a fire started in the starboard wingtip. After a few seconds this appeared to go out. We flew on course for approximately five minutes when the starboard wing was completely enveloped in flames. Fire also started in the fuselage. When the pilot saw this he gave the emergency jump order. I was the first to leave the aircraft, which was then approximately at 1000 feet, followed closely by the engineer and air-bomber. The pilot refused his parachute when it was offered to him.

When my chute opened I saw the aircraft hit the ground at an angle of forty-five degrees. It immediately burst into flames. I only saw two other chutes in the sky. The Dutch people who saw us bale out confirmed the fact that only three chutes were seen to leave the aircraft. We couldn't examine the wreck because the area in which it was situated was held by the enemy.

Signed. John S. Hume.



# Attachment 2 – Telegram 23 Sept 1944





## Attachment 3 – Letter 12 Feb 1945

Mail 13/2/45 Enc. 1

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ MU.9981 Casualty Section,  
391 Lit. Collins

RAAF.166/26/994(17A)

Dear Sir,

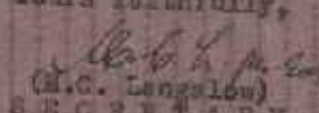
I desire to advise that Flight Sergeant Hume, Sergeant Evans and Flight Sergeant Gascoyne all Royal Air Force members of the crew, reported missing on the 20th September last with your son, Pilot Officer Maurice McHugh, returned safely to their Squadron and the following is a précis, which has been received from Overseas Headquarters, Royal Australian Air Force, London, of a statement made by Flight Sergeant Gascoyne.

The aircraft was hit during a bombing run causing the starboard wing to catch fire and the fire died out but caught all again. Your son ordered the crew to abandon the aircraft and Flight Sergeant Hume, Sergeant Evans and Flight Sergeant Gascoyne abandoned in the order in which they have been named.

Flight Sergeant Gascoyne was struck on the head and lost consciousness but recovered at approximately 800 feet from the ground and landed safely. He reports that Flight Sergeant Hume stated that he watched the aircraft spin down in flames out of control and that no other members were seen to leave the aircraft. Flight Sergeant Gascoyne landed approximately six miles north-east of Uden, Holland, which is located twenty miles north-east of Eindhoven.

I deeply regret to state that the foregoing report diminishes the hope that your son has survived. It is probable, therefore, that Air Ministry, London, will now reclassify the casualty in a more serious form by stating that your son is believed to have lost his life. If such reclassification should be made, this Department will inform you immediately.

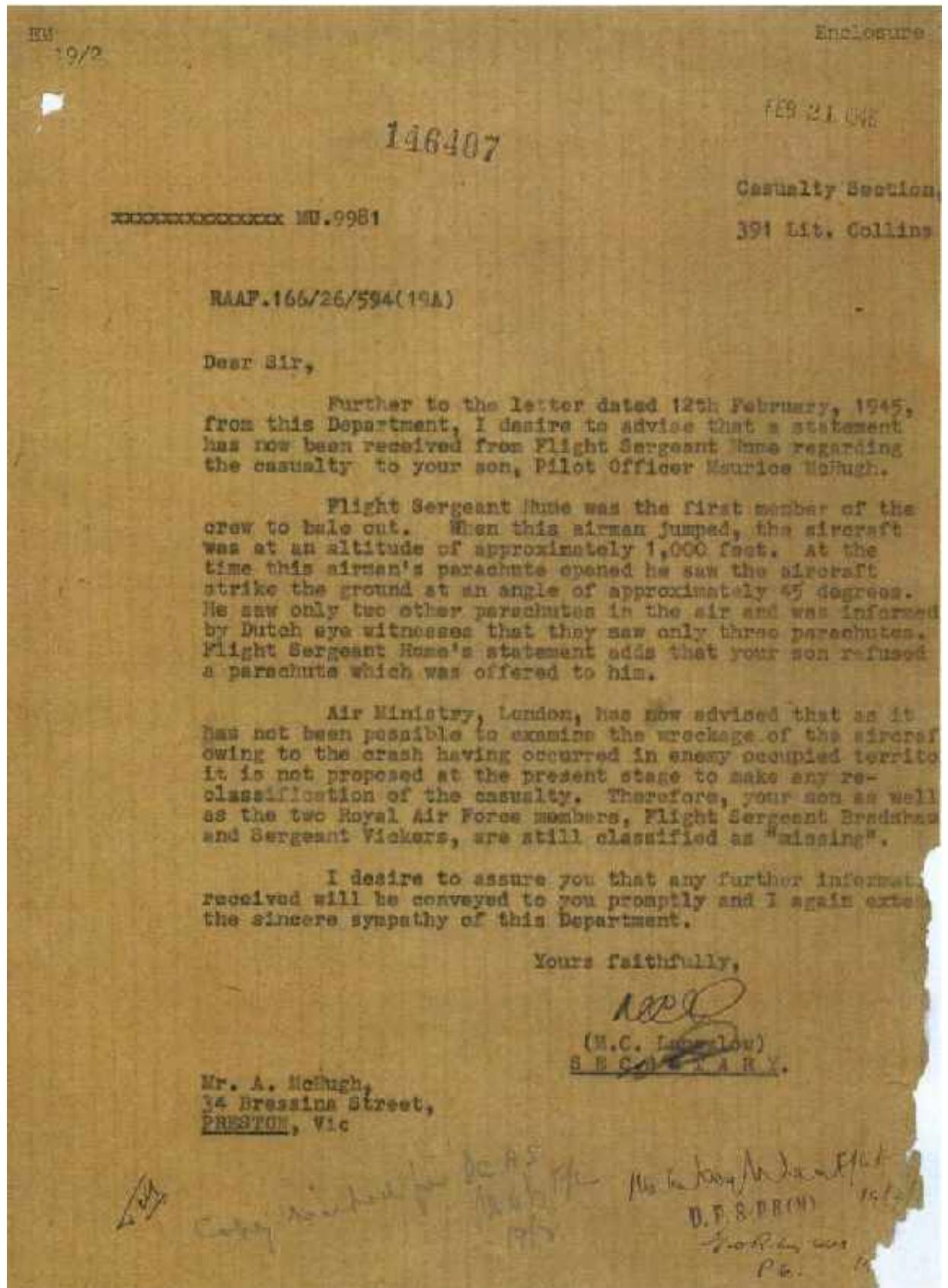
I desire to assure you of the constant sympathy of this Department.

Yours faithfully,  
  
 (M.C. Langslow)  
 SECRETARY

Mr. A. McHugh,  
 34 Bressina Street,  
 PRESTON, Vic.

(P.C.A.S. before despatch) D.P. 8-P6(N) 43

## Attachment 4 – Letter 21 Feb 1945





Attachment 5 –Letter 4 April 1945

COPY.

No. 620 Squadron,  
R.A.F. Station,  
GREAT DUNMOW,  
Essex. *End*

Ref: 6203/1632/76/P.1.

Dear Mrs. McHugh,

Air Marshal Hollinghurst has asked me to write to you about your son with whom the Air Marshal flew quite a few times.

I am afraid that up to the present, I cannot add much to the letter Wing Commander Lee wrote to your husband last September, except that we now know that three of your son's crew are safe.

I regret most strongly that I am unable to give you more information than this as I can fully appreciate your feelings about your son, and am well aware of the strain of having no news for so long.

If at any time I can give you more definite information I shall do so.

Yours very sincerely,

(Signed) G.T.WYNNE-POWELL.

Wing Commander, Commanding,  
No. 620 Squadron, R.A.F.

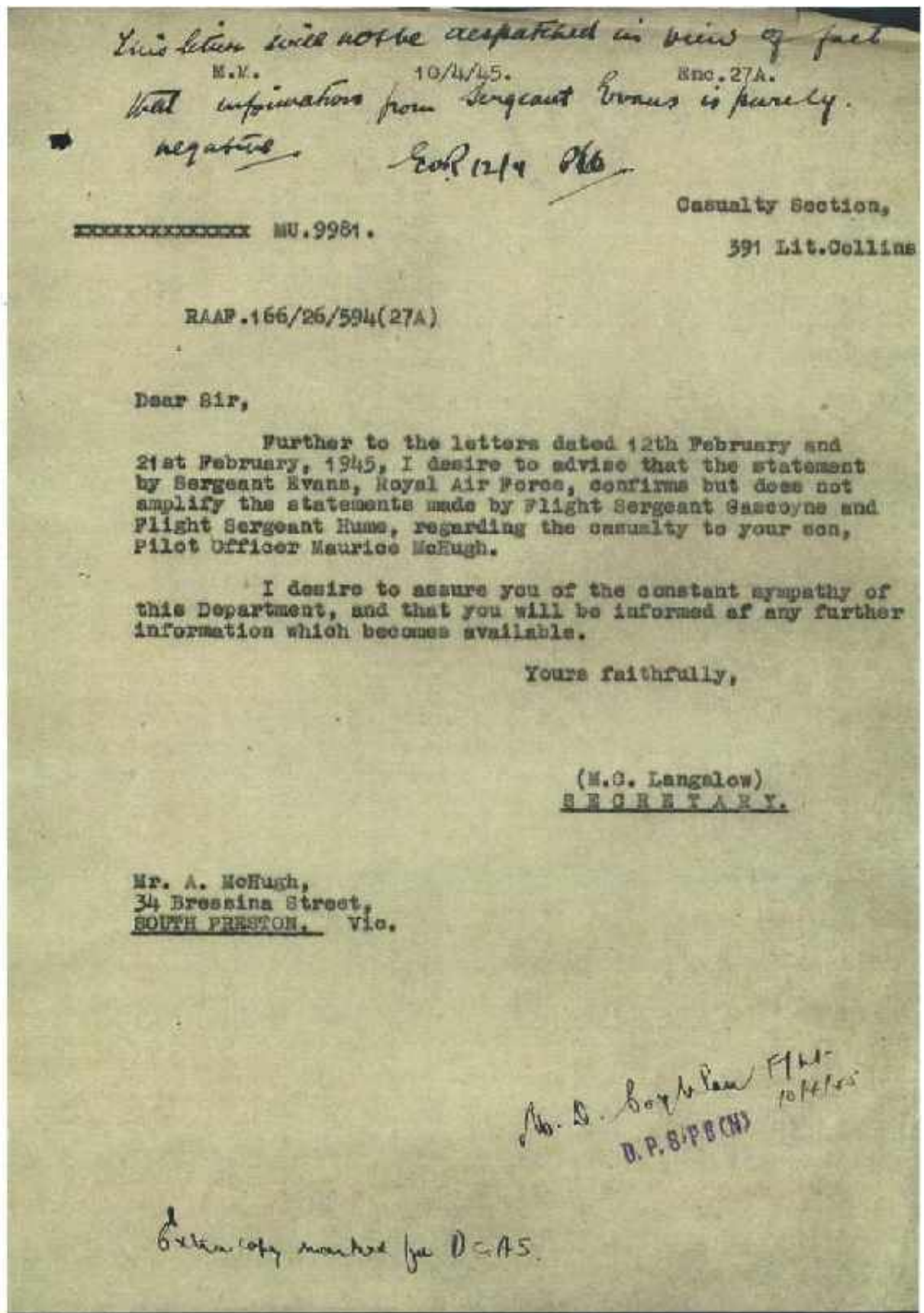
*BRESSINA.*

Mrs. McHugh,  
34 Breffna Street,  
Preston, N.18.,  
Victoria,  
Australia.

*Original forwarded  
N/K 11/11/115.*



## Attachment 6 –Letter 10 April 1945



## Attachment 7 - Letter from Grandma - 6 May 1945

16 June 504

44 Breffna St  
Orlston 1-8  
D. D. 13

To Secretary, Air Cadet.

Dear Sir,

Last September I received advice that my son 410,838 P.O. Ki Bugh was missing on an operation over Holland. I have since had a letter from Sgt. Gascoyne, who was a member of Mr Bugh's crew, telling of the operation.

Copy.

We took off that afternoon, 30 Sept, & reached our target with high hopes & very little opposition, but on making our "bombing run" encountered the most murderous flack we ever beheld. Maurice made his run, with the calm assurance of a veteran & we dropped our "load" accurately but on coming out were hit in several places and caught fire. The fire was fairly fierce & we had no hopes of ever putting it out, so the order to abandon aircraft, in the same steady voice, was given. Three of the crew managed to make it - myself being the last one. I'm sorry to say that Maurice, in his attempt to keep the plane in the air until the remainder



4 Jul 200

wrecked, stayed with it till it hit the ground  
I'm afraid that Maurice died fighting to  
gain control of the plane.")

This information should be available to Sir  
Kinnear & I feel it should be enough to  
presume death, and have the boy's effects  
sent home. His effects include a Bank  
account with "The Midland Bank at 504  
Christchurch Road, Boscombe, Bournemouth  
Hants." plus the sum of money for the sale  
of a car for which permission was given  
on 14<sup>th</sup> Dec 44, to sell.

Yours sincerely  
A. H. H. Hughes (16<sup>th</sup>)

Extract made for  
H. H. Hughes  
17/1/45

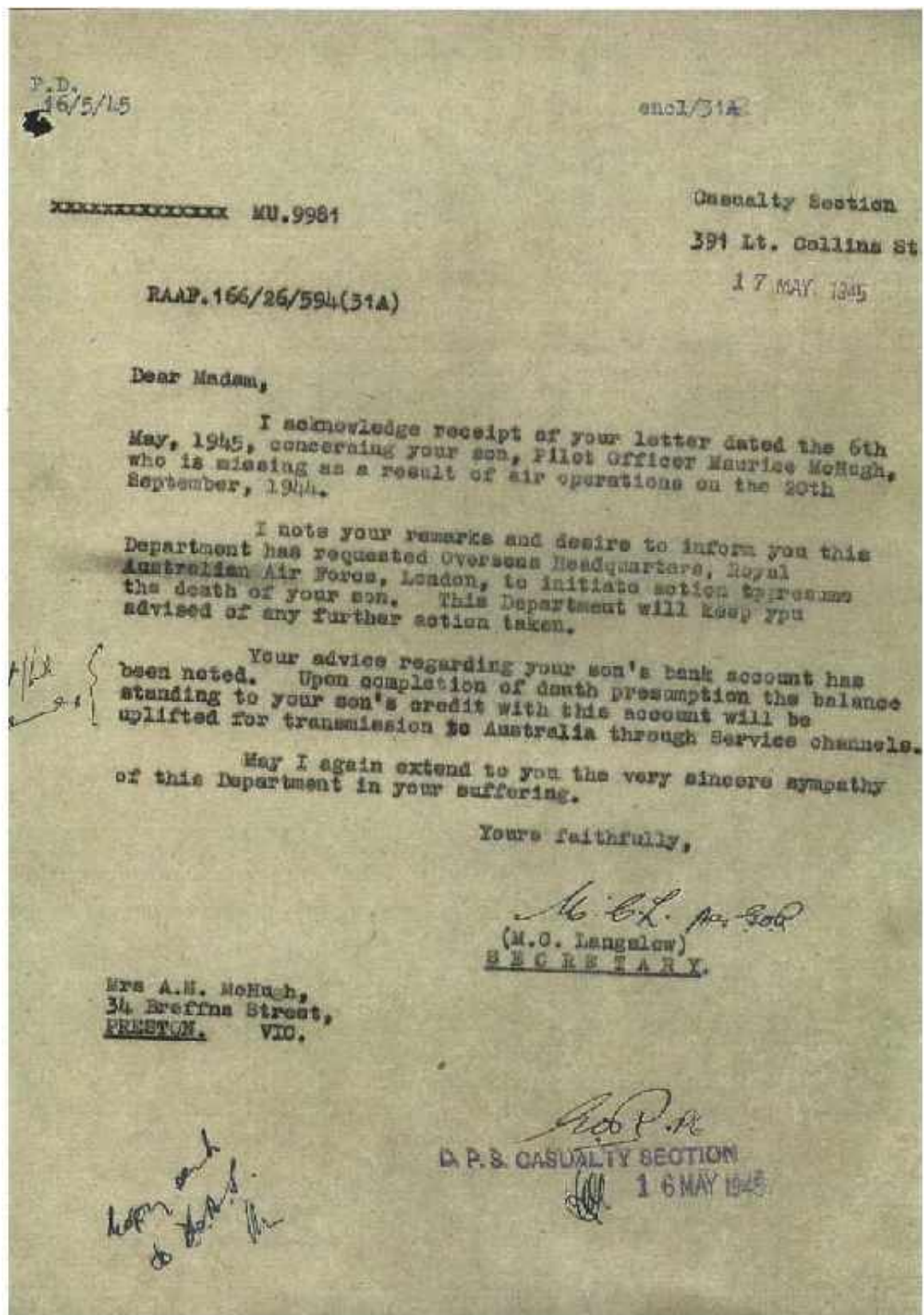
See KAPO on D/P

17/1/45

F/L

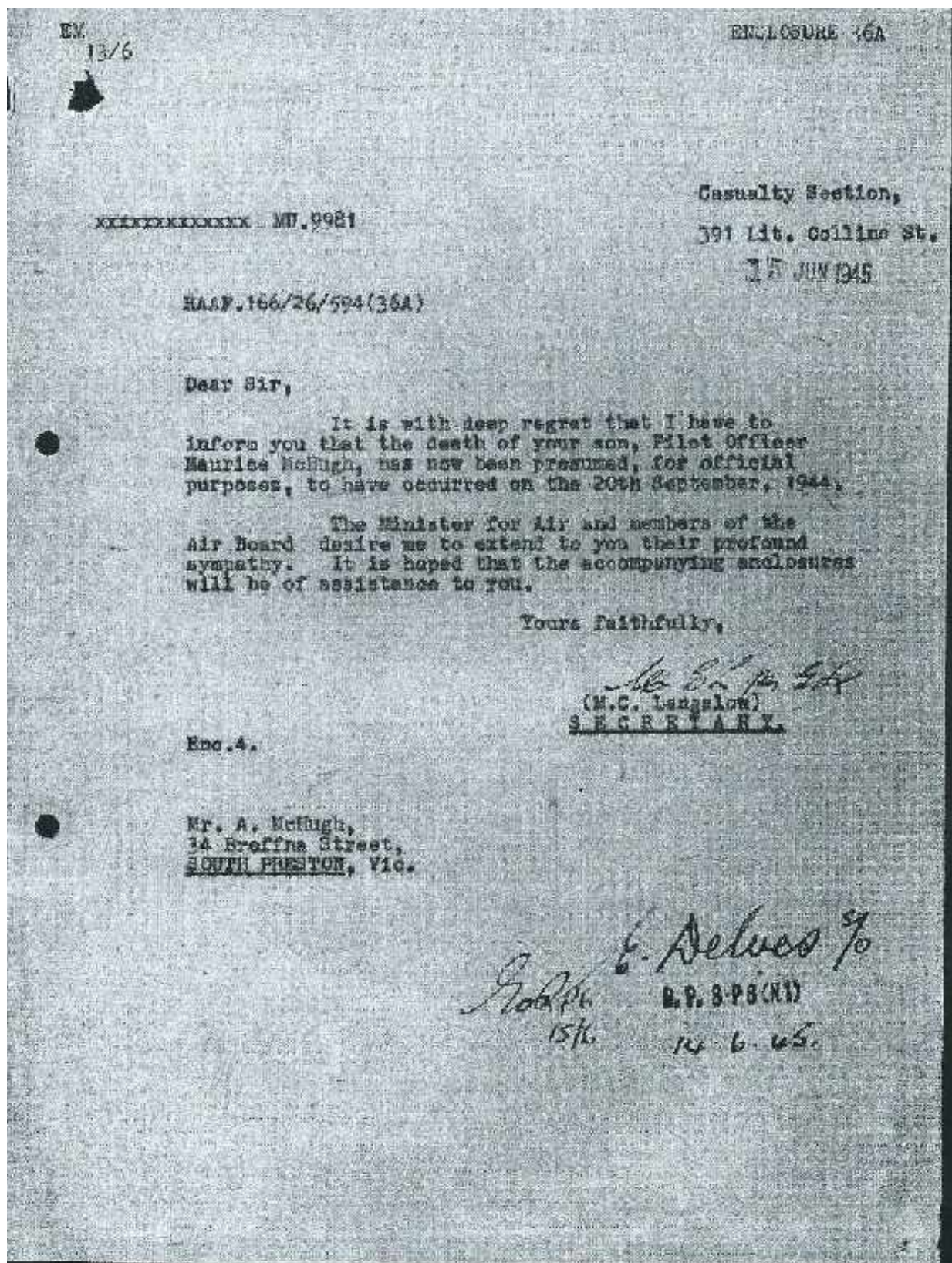


## Attachment 8 – Letter 17 May 1945

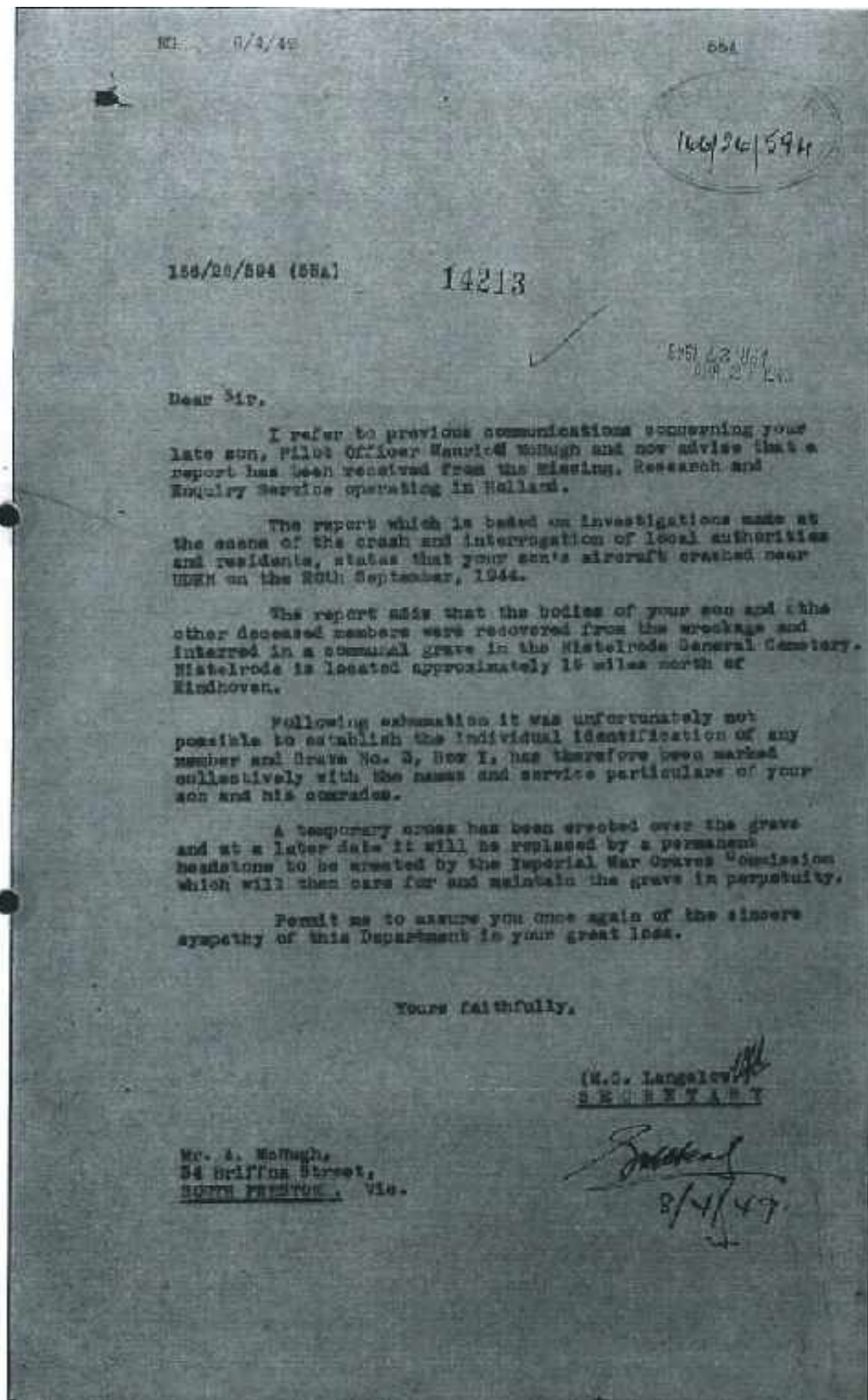




## Attachment 9 – Letter 15 June 1945

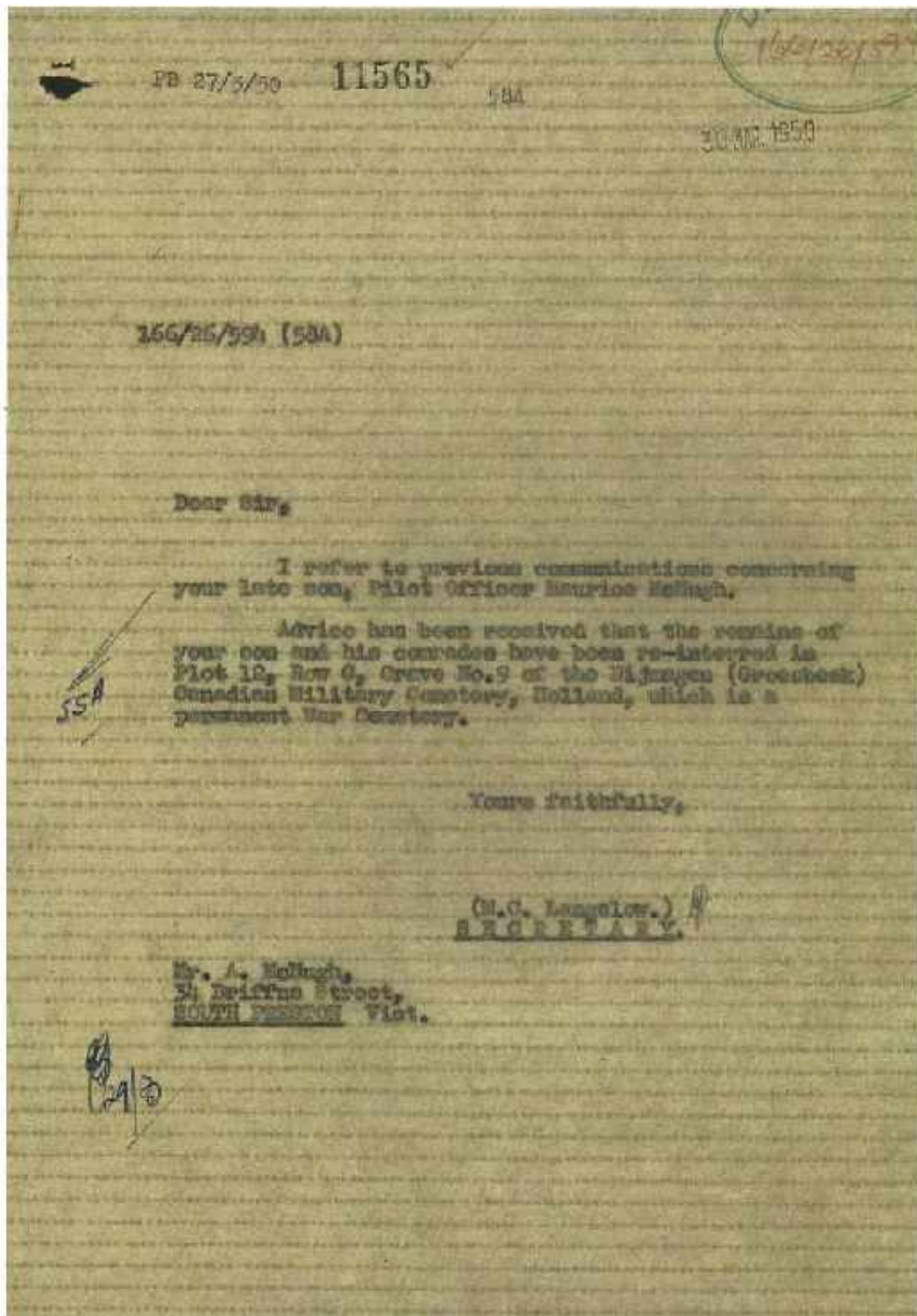


## Attachment 10 – Letter 8 April 1949

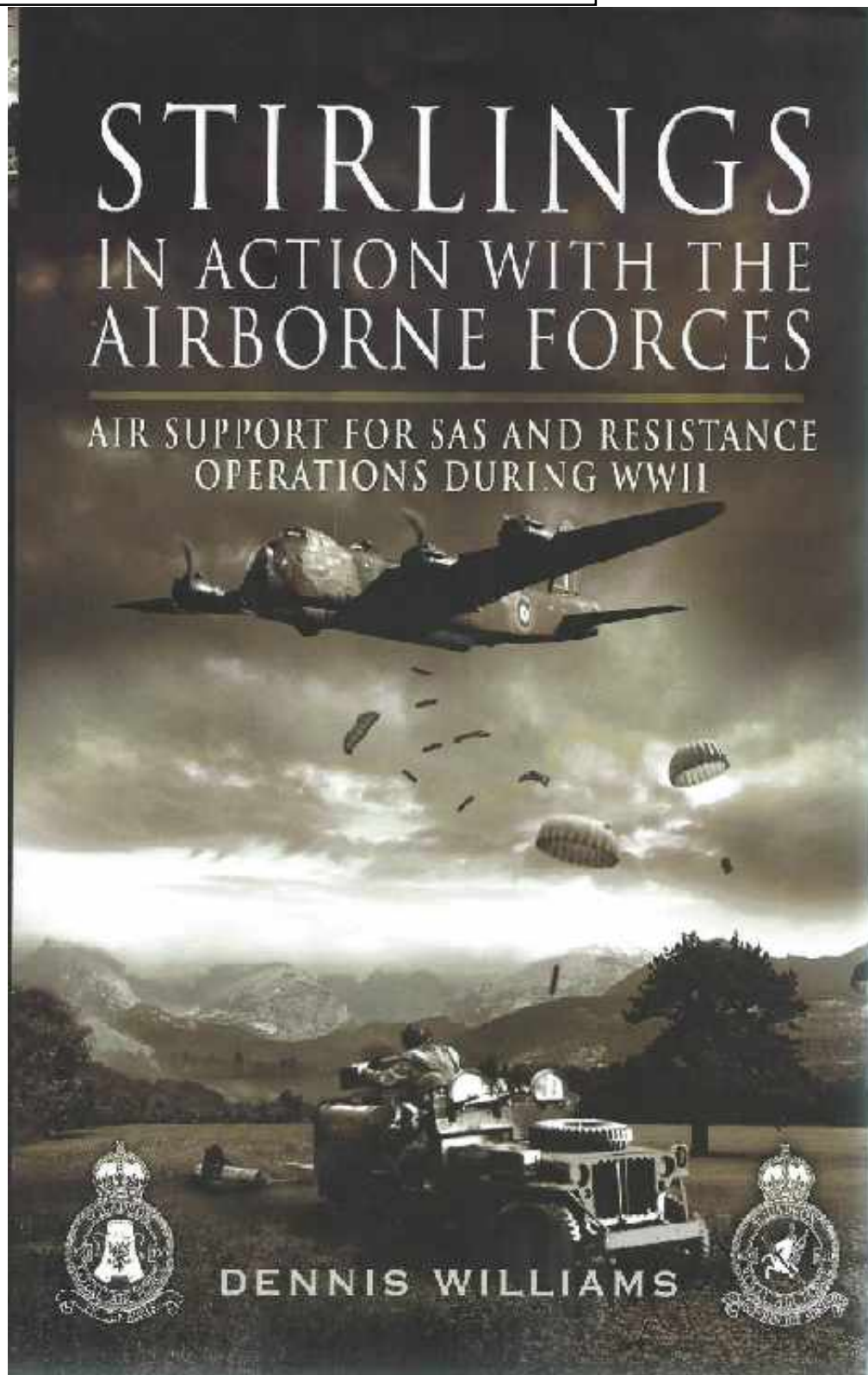




Attachment 11 – Letter 30 March 1950



Attachment 12 – Stirling's in Action





## STIRLINGS IN ACTION WITH THE AIRBORNE FORCES

David Evans recalled:

On Wednesday 20 September we were again required to deliver containers, but because of poor weather conditions take-off was delayed for two or three hours. As we approached Arnheim from the southerly direction the flak appeared much heavier than the previous day. Incendiary bullets tore into the trailing edge of the starboard wing setting it alight, and from my position in the astrodome I could see the flames. I discussed the extent of the fire with Tom Vickers, the rear gunner, who could view the underside of the wing from his position in the turret. We concurred eventually that the fire had been blown out in the slipstream. Minutes later I was momentarily blinded by dust as a cannon shell pierced the wooden frame of the astrodome within an inch of my nose. I was shocked to note that my position had been straddled by cannon fire which had made very neat holes about 18 inches apart in the floor of the compartment. This must have happened just as the bomb-aimer released the containers and our army colleagues were pushing out the baskets. We then climbed and were heading south for home, when we were again hit. This time it was an 88mm shell that went through a main petrol tank in the starboard wing, fortunately without exploding. I saw the hole appear in the wing, followed instantly by a fountain of high-octane fuel which became a roaring jet of fire. Within seconds the flames were inside the aircraft. My pint-sized fire extinguisher had no effect and I knew the aircraft was doomed.

I picked up my parachute pack and clipped it onto my harness as I made my way forward to the escape hatch in the bomb-aiming compartment. Jack Hume, the navigator, was ahead of me and I helped him to remove his helmet as he made his way down the steps into the bomb-aiming compartment. As Nick Gascoyne, the bomb-aimer, opened the hatch, the navigator went on his way, to be followed by myself. Foolishly I went out feet first, clasping the ripcord handle, which I pulled when I felt I was clear of the doomed aircraft. As the parachute pack opened it caught my chin with such force as to render me unconscious. By the time I regained consciousness I had hit the ground, and was surrounded by about a dozen people, two of whom supported me as I stood up. I was in RAF blue battledress which, being stained and faded, looked similar to German field grey. The first question asked of me by a young English-speaking girl was 'Are you English?' I replied 'Yes' and enquired if she was Dutch, to which they all shook their heads. I then thought I had landed across the border in Germany, but they had thought I had asked if they were 'Deutsch', then wond for German. When I finally realised who they were I took out a packet of 'Players' cigarettes which finally clinched my nationality. I was then taken across a field to a farmhouse and made to sit at a table for some food. The kind farmer and his wife gave me a boiled duck-egg, some bread and a mug of tea. In my concussed state I did not feel hungry, but felt obliged to eat because of the hospitality shown to me. Indeed, I had to eat a second egg and was glad when a young man arrived at the farmhouse and announced that he would take me to the British Army. As I got up from the table I looked around the room and saw several young faces in every window, and I thought to myself that all the children of the village had come to gaze at the strange parachutist. It was only long after the war was over that I learnt that the farmer had twenty children.



## BATTLE OVER ARNHEM

The young man who had called for me was a member of the resistance organisation and wore an orange band on his sleeve. He mounted his light-weight motorcycle and bade me sit on the pillion, at the same time handing me the German rifle he was carrying, advising me to beware of snipers. Very soon we were meeting the vanguard of a column of British tanks, and there was bewilderment on the faces of the soldiers as they peeped out of their turrets. I am sure they did not expect to see an RAF sergeant, capless and with his face all bloody, riding pillion on a miniature motorcycle.

My destination, a large building like a town hall, was quickly reached and as I walked to the door I noticed a row of civilians. They had their hands up against the wall of the building, so that they could be easily searched, and I was promptly told that they were collaborators whom had been rounded up as soon as the Germans left. There to greet me as I entered the hall were my two fellow crew members, namely Flight Sergeants Hume and Gascoyne. They were having cuts and bruises attended to by some nursing sisters of a religious order. Jack Hume was almost unscathed in spite of the fact that his parachute had only been attached to his harness by one strap. Nick Gascoyne had a cut above an eye but otherwise was in one piece, although in his haste he had forgotten to fasten the side straps of his parachute harness, and could easily have fallen out of the harness. Of the eight crew members we were the only three to escape.

We learned that those who were expected to deliver us from the enemy were in fact 12 RAF Regiment men and their CO, a young Flight Lieutenant. They were occupying a large house on the eastern outskirts of the town of Uden at which we had arrived. They welcomed us as reinforcements and found us a motley array of weapons, since we were all three unarmed. I recall being handed a revolver, but was glad that I did not have to make use of it. Some time during the night we had a visit from our Dutch allies who were very keen to get to grips with the enemy who had suppressed them for so long. I think they were a little disgusted with us when we suggested that perhaps we should wait until more help arrived. The RAF Regiment group had the task of organising the repair of a local airfield, so that it could be used as a forward base by fighter aircraft. Having fallen out of the sky so unexpectedly we were ill prepared to carry out the simplest ablutions, but with the help of our newly found colleagues we were able to make ourselves presentable the following morning. This was fortunate because the Flight Lieutenant announced that he and the three of us were invited out to breakfast with the Underground leaders for the district.

We were led to a big house, indeed a mansion, and breakfast was served in a large room which had windows opening out onto a garden with a stream at the bottom. All I can remember of the meal after all these years is that we were served with a large glass of gin, and no doubt we drank toasts to all our allies, or at least pretended to drink, because the drink was not entirely to my taste at such an early hour. After the meal we all went out onto a balcony overlooking a square where a large crowd had gathered, and then proceeded to cheer us. Souvenirs were exchanged such as Dutch and English coins, buttons, insignias, brevets and postcards. Whilst we were being feted by the newly liberated townsfolk of Uden, our resistance friends were busy arranging to evacuate us to Eindhoven and on home to England. One problem that morning was that our route south was being shelled by enemy artillery, but by about 2.00 pm it was considered safe for us to leave. A large Chevrolet car arrived, driven by a

## STIRLING IN ACTION WITH THE AIRBORNE FORCES

heavily-armed Orange man who announced he and his colleague would take us to Eindhoven.

The journey was not easy because we had to make our way against the tide of British Army vehicles that were surging towards Nijmegen along just one available road. So heavy was the traffic that some vehicles were using the fields alongside as extra tracks. The countryside was littered with shattered and still-burning corpses of cows and horses, splintered trees, burnt out tanks and vehicles. There were also newly-dug graves, marked by the helmets of dead Germans.

As we arrived in Eindhoven our first sight was of the Philips factory, then only a tangled mass of steel girders. We were taken to one of the few intact buildings, which was being used as the headquarters of the Dutch Resistance in the area. Our companions were made to hand over their weapons, much to their disgust, and told to return home. After a few questions we were taken to a civilian lorry of the type used for carrying hay and straw. The deck of the lorry was already occupied by a group of American glider pilots who had landed at the Grave and Nijmegen bridges. We joined them and after a wait for some more American stragglers we were on our way to Brussels. There we arrived at the Hotel Angleterre, just as the daylight faded, and bade farewell to our American allies. The British then proceeded to take charge of our immediate needs. The food comprised some atrocious captured German 'ersatz' rations, so before going to sleep we decided to taste some Belgian food and drink. Money was no problem, as what little Dutch money we had been given was enough to allow us to sample some Belgian beer. We were made very welcome in our Air Force blue uniforms, which contrasted with the khaki of all the other uniforms to be seen in newly-liberated Brussels. Although the food at the Angleterre was bad, the beds were comparatively luxurious. After breakfast, transport to the airfield was arranged and before long we were aboard an RAF Dakota, but feeling a little apprehensive without parachutes. The flight to England was uneventful, our fellow passengers being other RAF aircrew who had spent various periods of time in hiding after being shot down over occupied Europe. They thought us very fortunate, being able to escape so easily.

On arrival at Northolt we were ushered through Customs with nothing to declare, our dishevelled state enough to indicate our status. My battledress sleeve was torn, my face carried the scars of the parachute straps, and my cap was missing. Nick had a nasty gash above his left eye, and on his feet were German jackboots. The RAF authorities at Northolt issued us with travel warrants and we caught the tube to Paddington railway station where we had to wait for a train to Fairford via Oxford. This gave me an opportunity to telephone home – my mother answered and you can imagine the joy there was to learn I was safe. She had received a telegram, announcing that my aircraft had failed to return, but that there was a chance that I was alive and in captivity.

We caught the last train from Oxford to Fairford and reported to the guard-room about midnight, to be told that a new crew had taken our billet, and that we should report to the sick-bay. The following morning we enjoyed a sleep-in before we were visited by our CO, Wing Commander Lee, who was very anxious to learn about the situation over Arnhem, since he was to go on the next operation. Little did he realise then that he also would become a casualty by crash landing. Later we were debriefed and then collected our personal



## BATTLE OVER ARNHEM

effects which had been impounded, this being normal procedure when crews went missing on operations. On Sunday 21 September we collected leave passes and were on our way north in an old Singer saloon car owned by Jock Hume. I drove it as far as Bangor-on-Dee where Jock's girlfriend lived. On reaching Bangor I then hitched a lift towards home and eventually arrived in Ruthin to meet loved ones.

By the evening of 20 September, the Battle of Arnhem was all but lost, since the last of the gallant defenders at the road bridge had neither food nor ammunition left. The following morning they were overwhelmed as German tanks moved northwards across the bridge. Meanwhile, the troops within the shrinking perimeter around the 1st Airborne Divisional HQ remained under heavy fire.

For the RAF, 21 September 1944 turned out to be the most disastrous day of Operation 'Market'. Resupply drops were flown in four waves, and although fighters escorted the first and second waves, those assigned as cover for the third and fourth remained on the ground, owing to poor weather over their bases. Among the unescorted Dakotas and Stirlings were ten aircraft from 190 Squadron, and eleven from 620 Squadron, which had taken off from Fairford just after midday. Over Ostend, conditions were murky, beneath an overcast sky, but visibility improved to several miles in the Arnhem area, under a 2,500 ft cloud base. Once again, the flak was fierce and accurate.

Jim Marshall recalled:

Our next flight to Arnhem was on 21 September. As the Fairford aircraft were starting to taxi out, the armourers reported a short circuit in my bomb-racks, so I was held up. I still hoped to catch up with the stream but the CO drove onto the runway ahead and stopped me from rolling. It had been decided that I would rendezvous with a Dakota squadron over Eindhoven, where we would have the cover of a Thunderbolt fighter wing for our run-in to Arnhem. During the trip to Eindhoven everything seemed normal and I circled there awaiting the Daks; they arrived but there were no fighters. So I took up a position ahead of them and started my run-in. Our DZ was on the front lawn of a large house which apparently was about all we still held. On the way in, one did not require a bomb aimer to map read as the trail of burning Stirlings and Dakotas pointed the way. The DZ seemed to be surrounded, with the German tanks using their 88's as anti-aircraft guns. They were hitting us, and I even saw German soldiers behind trees with Schmeissers and they too were hitting us. Looking back I could see the Daks taking an awful pasting and one, which was on fire, held course until its crew had pushed out their parachutes over the DZ and then it crashed in flames. Another Dak looped the loop before going nose first into the roof of a house.

With all the fighter strength available on the continent, I think that somebody had their finger in, for we did not see any friendly fighters and it appeared that the main stream, which I had been delayed from joining, had run into fighters from Deelen, a German base just north of Arnhem and so close that they could almost shoot us down as they did circuits of their own field. Fortunately, they were all refuelling when we came in.

There were some small holes in our aircraft and I think they later counted two hundred bullet holes, but the four engines kept turning as we raced home. At one stage, I looked back and saw Al Boardman, our flight engineer, jumping from side to side, dodging shrapnel as it came through the floor and sides – as



*Britse bommenwerper in 1944 in Vorstenbosch neergestort*

# Vliegtuigwrak nu geborgen

(Van een onze verslaggever)

**VORSTENBOSCH** - De Bergingdienst van de Koninklijke Luchtmacht heeft gisteren een groot aantal wrakstukken van een Britse bommenwerper uit de Tweede Wereldoorlog opgegraven en naar Gifse-Rijen vervoerd. De wrakstukken werden vrijdag bij grondingsovername in een weiland in Vorstenbosch ontdekt. Toen werden ook twee helmschutten en een hoewelbeeld mannelijk aangetroffen.

De bommenwerper startte naar in september 1944. Hij was zeer vreesdelijk met voortreden om de weg van Engeland naar Antwerpen. Hij had ongeluk met de bommenwerper, een viermotorige Sturtevant kwam vijf minuten om. Volgens luchtmachtbevelhebber G. Zwambag is het mogelijk, dat andere bemanningleden de ramp overleefden.

De bergingdienst trof vrijdag en zaterdag twee motoren en flarddelen van het landingsgestel en wat onafgebroken beelden reestig staal en aluminium. Overblijfselen van de schiettoeren worden niet gevonden.

**Zwambag:** "De vliegtuigbevelhebber is naar Engeland overgebracht."



Dit zijn de wrakstukken van de bommenwerper die het Britse vliegtuig bij zich had.

De lichteacht heeft naderhand ook wel de goudse wrakstukken geborgen, maar het kleinste spul onder de grond laten liggen: er daarbij enige granaten over het veld gezien.

## Weggerend

Terwijl Zwambag met een



rijdscooter door de wijd wandelt, komt de 30-jarige weduwe Dora Verbeet (nederl.). Ze heeft al tijd vlakbij de plaats van het ongeluk in een veld. Aan de blauwehoef gewand. "Ik weet het nog goed. Het was een uur of vier vroege en ik was alleen met de hond omringd kwam. We zijn toen met de kinderen hard weggerend."

Het vliegtuig viel vlakbij de boerderij. We durften niet zo gaan kijken. Toen was dat hier nog bel en die vloeg allemaal in brand. De zuren uit Vorstenbosch hebben de lijken naderhand begraven. Ik geloof, dat de Engelsen de lichte rase naar huis genomen hebben.

De bejaarden vrouw wijst naar de oerwoud van Van der Lande.

Restanten van de 31 jaar geleden in Vorstenbosch verongelukkig Britse bommenwerper. Lichte de 30-jarige weduwe Dora Verbeet (nederl.) heeft de lijken van de bemanning van het vliegtuig begraven. De lijken zijn nu in de oerwoud van Van der Lande.

gebeld. "Het zal na 53 jaar onder de grond nog zo kan blijven, heb ik."

Volgens de rijdscooter in Nederland hebben veel mensen naar aanleiding van het bericht zand in deze kring over de veld van de vliegtuigen, in het veld en het veld een lichte gewand. Het is zeker, dat er ook een aantal spullen met haar heb ik, aldus de politie.



## DIERENARTS J. THURING VERTELT HET VERHAAL VAN DE BOMMENWERPER DIE BIJ VORSTENBOSCH NEERSTORTTE:

# Het vliegtuig dat nog één keer opsteeg

(Van een ander verslaggever)

**VORSTENBOSCH** - De oorlog '40-'45 ligt alweer heel wat jaartjes achter ons, al ligt de natuurlijke herinnering erin nog bij velen vers in het geheugen. Tal van mensen houden zich harden ten dage nog - hetzij beroepsmatig, hetzij uit liefhebberij - bezig met die zwarte bladzijden uit het geschiedensboek. Een van hen is de Hecche die-rens J. Thuring, die er zijn hobby van gemaakt heeft de juiste toedracht en de achtergronden van rampen op het gebied van de luchtvaart in de oorlogsjaren te achterhalen. Thuring weet ook bijna alles te vertellen van het vliegtuigverval, dat enige weken geleden tussen Vorstenbosch en Nistelrode bij graafwerkzaamheden aangetroffen werd.

Er zijn tussen de 5000 en 6000 vliegtuigen neergelost in Nederland in de jaren 1940-'45. Een daarvan was de onder Vorstenbosch gevonden Stirling bommenwerper. We laten de heer Thuring aan het woord:

Op dinsdag 30 september 1944 werd het veld duidelijk dat de operatie Market-Garden niet geheel volgens plan verliep. De eerste geallieerde troepen had-

den dan wel Nijmegen bezet via Veldhof en Grave, maar de brug over de Waal bij Nijmegen was - weliswaar intact - nog steeds in Duitse handen. Vooral bij Arnhem kampen de Engelsen met grote problemen, al was de noordelijke oprit van de brug over de Nederrijn nog onder controle van de eerste Engelse luchtdwingsdivisie.

De beslissing zou de woensdag daarop kunnen vallen als de omstandigheden gunstig waren. Het mistige weer in Engeland

beïnvloedde het vertrek van een aantal vliegtuigen met voorraden, die om 10 uur het luchtruim zouden kiezen.

De transportvliegtuigen, die ten zuidwesten van Londen gestationeerd waren, konden pas tegen een uur 's middags vertrekken. Op dat moment maakten een noorden van Londen zich drie duizend Polen onder leiding van generaal Tosa, bowal klaar om in Driel gedropt te worden. Vanwege het weer was hun vlucht wederom

uitgesteld.

Het zal rond het middaguur geweest zijn, dat de 21-jarige uit Australië afkomstige piloot K. McHugh vanaf een Zuiden-

gels vliegveld zijn viermotorige transportvliegtuig, omgeven door de Stirling bommenwerper voor het laatste de lucht inschurde. In het 30 meter lange tussel bevonden zich 4 bommen en twee tot drie 20- en 40-ponderende granaten, die de in maanden geleden voorraden met een totaal gewicht van 2000 kilogram door een luik naar buiten zonden gieten.

Te tweenuerhalf uur duende de vlucht leide langs Londen via Dover over de Noordzee, waar het toestel door de Duitse radarposten werd gesignaleerd. Via Oostende ging het naar Gent en Geel, die reeds bevestigd waren. Daar draaide het toestel gel naar het noorden om Nederland binnen te vliegen. Het meest gevaarlijke onderdeel van de vlucht brak aan. Vrij laag vliegend zag de bemanning de agnats van de Engelse troepen via St-Oedenrode, Veghel, Grave en Nijmegen. De strijd om de spoorbrug over de Waal was in volle gang. Tot dan toe had de Stirling weinig tegenstand ontmoet, maar ten noor-

dit is de propeller van het vliegtuig met dat enkele toeken deden tussen Vorstenbosch en Nistelrode werd opgedrukt.



Een bommenwerper als deze, een viermotorige Stirling, stortte in september 1944 bij Vorstenbosch neer.

abog. Zij zijn begraven op het militaire oorlogskerkhof te Groesbeek. Het is niet bekend of de slachtoffers door vijandige afweerschuif of bij het neerstorten omkwamen. Op directie de dag zijn tegen andere transportvliegtuigen neergeschoten en slechts een klein deel van de afgeworpen voorraden kwam bij de ingesloten Engelse troepen terecht.

### Tegenstrijdig

Volgens het archief van de gemeente Nistelrode stortte het vliegtuig op vrijdag 22 september 1944 in Vorstenbosch neer. Dat stroomt niet met de gegevens van de heer Thuring, want die zegt dat de ramp twee dagen eerder plaats had. De afgelegen plek en de verworrende besluiten uit die dagen zullen wel debet zijn aan de tegenstrijdigheid.



## Attachment 14 – Dutch newspaper articles 2013

plaatje 39 woensdag 24 september 2014

**Australiër bezoekt plek waar zijn oom is neergestort in WO II**

## Emoties aan Meuwelweg



**Emotie.** Peter Mc Hugh en militair attaché Bill Sowry van de Australische ambassade op de plek waar in de Tweede Wereldoorlog het vliegtuig van de oom van Mc Hugh neerstortte

**VORSTENBOSCH** - Hij had hoogstens een man of zes uit de buurt verwacht, maar vrijdagmiddag werd de Australische Peter Mc Hugh overvonden door de grote belangstelling voor zijn komst. Hij kwam kijken op de plek waar zijn oom, vlieger Maurice Mc Hugh tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog was neergestort. Het werd een bijzonder emotioneel en verrassend uur.

*Door Paula van Hout*

Vertegenwoordigers van vliegbasis Volkel, buurtbewoners en groep acht van basisschool Op Weg uit Vorstenbosch stonden het bezoek op te wachten. Mc Hugh werd vergezeld door militair attaché van de ambassade Bill Sowry en een tv-ploegje uit Australië. Dat maakte veel indruk op de belangstellenden.

Na een korte ontvangst door loco-burgemeester Rien Wijdeven werd Mc Hugh overstelpt met verhalen van omwonenden over de dag waarop het vliegtuig in het weiland aan de Meuwelweg naar beneden kwam. Het was 20 september 1944 en operatie Market Garden

was in volle gang. De Stirling werd bij Arnhem al geraakt maar de piloot had het toestel onder controle en deed een poging om Engeland toch nog te halen. Hij kwam niet verder dan Vorstenbosch. De piloot, de oom van Peter dus, bleef op zijn post maar beval de zevenkoppige bemanning te springen met een parachute. Later blijkt uit een rapport dat de vlieger zelf een parachute weigerde. Dankzij het dappere optreden van de vlieger hebben drie inzittenden het overleefd. De piloot was pas 21 jaar. Zijn neef Peter heeft hij nooit gekend. Toch begon die een zoektocht. "Omdat mijn vader, ook piloot, nooit geweten heeft wat er met zijn broer is gebeurd. Pas in 1956 wist hij dat die in Groesbeek is begraven. Via lostaircraft.com kwam ik achter de locatie van de crash. "En toen kregen wij opeens een brief uit Australië", zegt William van der Donk van de Nistelhofdesedijk. Ik kende het verhaal niet, maar in de buurt waren er genoeg die wisten waar deze Mc Hugh naar op zoek was. Het gebeurde tegenover de familie Verhoeven. Via internet hebben we gegevens uitgewisseld en nu is hij hier."

De tachtigers Jan en Twan Smolenaers waren aardappelen aan het rapen toen het vliegtuig naar beneden kwam. Ze waren elf en 12 jaar oud en zijn het nooit vergeten. Ze waren er ook bij toen pas in 1977 het toestel opgegraven is. "Het was diep in de grond geslagen en is daar maar blijven liggen." Toen er een laag grond verwijderd werd van het weiland kwam het wrak pas weer tevoorschijn. Er was vrijdag een korte herdenking, bloemen werden gelegd en cadeautjes uitgewisseld. Voor de kinderen had Mc Hugh een Australische vlag, voor de gemeente een herinneringsplaquette. Buurtbewoner Toon van der Heijden kwam met iets heel speciaals. Hij schonk een stel schaatsen, gemaakt uit brokstukken van het vliegtuig die zijn vader Ties vond in de omgeving. Toon leerde er op schaatsen. Mc Hugh was ontdaan en schoot vol bij zoveel hartelijkheid. "I feel so welcome here. It's amazing." De propeller van het vliegtuig is bewaard gebleven en ligt in de traditiekamer van vliegbasis Volkel. Na de koffie ging Mc Hugh en zijn gezelschap ook daar een kijkje nemen.

**Service**

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# Tranen als puzzel na 70 jaar in elkaar valt

**Australiër vindt in Vorstenbosch sterfplaats oom en delen van diens vliegtuig.**



door Peter van der Zyp

**VORSTENBOSCH** - Het is Newry in zijn dorp dat hij als militeaire zwaai van de Australische ambassade tot een klein getuigenis bij een eenzijdige gebeurtenis. De verrijkelingen eind van de laatste maanden helemaal in de richting geroepen. Maar vandaag is een speciale dag. Een landingsplaats van een vliegtuig in Vorstenbosch aan het eind van een circulaire reis. Peter McHugh heeft daar een laatste moment gekend, maar dat maakt de ontmoeting bij diens sterfplaats niet minder heilig. „Hij was vader van me als oom. Maarke piloot bij de RAAF (Australische luchtmacht, red.). Hij heeft nooit geweten wat er met zijn oom is gebeurd. Dat heeft hem altijd dwars gezeten. Hier en nu was we wisten in dat hij in Chetick ligt begraven.”

Vorig jaar hebben de Australiërs de laatste laatste laatste, na het inschrijven van wat data, een kleine onderzoek naar zijn laatste laatste. De laatste laatste laatste met een van het oom. Maarke McHugh was neergeslagen in de buurt van Vorstenbosch.



van de Meuwegweg om precies te zijn. „Ik heb het alles van de nacht van zijn laatste moment. Het is een brief geschreven” verklaart Peter McHugh. Op dat moment woonde William van der Dijk. Hij was niet bekend met het verhaal van het neergestorte vliegtuig, maar een rondje door de buurt leerde hem al snel dat de Australiër op het goede spoor zat. Het vliegtuig was in 1944 neergeslagen op een veldje van de familie Verhoeven. Later (red. Toms (red) en Betsy (red) ze hebben het allemaal zien gebeuren. Zijn moeder was bezig met de

**“Mijn vader heeft nooit geweten wat er met zijn broer gebeurd is”**  
Peter McHugh



■ Peter McHugh (links) gaf een Australische vlag aan kinderen van Op Weg. Naast hem: militair attaché Bill Searcy, foto: Jeroen Kozak/van Anraadt

was op de bleekwiel. Toen het vliegtuig crashte, zocht ze snel een veiligheidsplan met de kinderen. Om het (53) en Toms (52) trouwen in 1928 de ramp gebeurde. „We waren ploegen aan het reizen en namen de vliegtuigen ernstig richting Antwerpen en later te rugkomen. Hoorde brandde aan de vleugel en stroom op overhand werd meer van ons heen. We werden erop af, maar hielden beide krullen en kregen fluiten. Het voor het moment ontloffen. We deden in de vloer.” Vrijwilligers waren op slag dood. Toen anderen waren veilig met de parachute geland. Peter McHugh heeft een militaire rapport over de crash achterhaald. Een van de overlevenden beschrijft daarin dat Alton McHugh de mannen heeft

vliegweg te verlaten. Zelf weigerde hij zijn parachute. Toen Maarten zag, met niet een held genoemd worden. Als Peter McHugh een piloot was aan de oerlogsmacht van Willem heeft overhandigd en een Australische vlag aan de kinderen van het vliegtuig. Hij kreeg trouw een heel mooi beeld geschenk. Het van der Heijden (red) overhandigde een paar zelfgemaakte schakels van de Australië. De onderbinderen van van, spontaan gemaakt dat de vader van Toms op de crashplaats stond. „Hij had een wijning naar op geschied.” Het verhaal van Peter McHugh schied, vol Toms velen op en hij onthield Van der Heijden. „Wat is dit omring. Ik weet dat mijn vader dit had meesleefd.”

**Geen flitspaal op de gevaarlijke**

**Pivot Park neemt rol van**

vrijdag 20 september 2014

De Maasbommelkrant

5

## Schaatsen als herinnering na 70 jaar

VORSTENBOSCH – In de wijk van de familie Verhoeven startte op 20 september 1944 een baanwielwedstrijd met daarin militairen van het 60th squadron van de RAAF (Royal Australian Airforce). Een van de vijf Australiërs was Maurice Hugh en nu, zeventig jaar na dato, is zijn neef Peter McHugh hier op bezoek gekomen om zijn oom de laatste eer te bewijzen.

De vader van Peter McHugh heeft nooit geweten wat er met zijn zoon gebeurd is en kan daar maar moeilijk mee leven. Als een jong jaar was Peter McHugh de coördinator van de pik waar het vliegtuig neerstortte.



Peter McHugh met familie voor de foto op vrijdag.

Peter: "Ik heb toen contact gezocht met het dichtstbijzijnde adres, met succes. Ik ben nu op zoek naar mijn oom en zijn familie. Het werd hier met zoveel warmte onthaald. Kennis dat mijn vader dit niet meer mag maken."

Peter McHugh was, volgens informatie van zijn op de pik van de Vriesweg tussen Vrijheid en Vrijheidseind, een van de vijf Australiërs die met zijn oom de pik van de Vriesweg een paarschaatsen in ontvangst mocht nemen, de eervolste van het vliegtuig, brak hij. Daarnaast kon worden zei hij: "Ik heb hier geen woorden voor." In de aanwezigheid van Welthout Rijk 'Wijde-voet', basisschool en leerlingen van groep acht van basisschool Op Vrijheid, de ontvanger Peter de laatste herinnering aan zijn oom in ontvangst nemen en zelf een medaille van Maurice Hugh van Australische vlieg en een plekje met de namen van de indertien van het vliegtuig, die begraven liggen op de Canadese begraafplaats in Vrijheid.

Kaartverdeling van de begraafplaatsontvanger. Maurice Hugh en zijn familie werden in het huis van Peter McHugh.

### Hello

My head is still spinning from yesterday.  
I couldn't sleep last night.  
I hope you also had a good day.  
I wasn't expecting so many people.  
I wish I had brought more things to give  
out to all the children.  
It was the most wonderful day of my life.  
Dutch!!  
I wish my family and I were able to visit.  
I wish I got a chance to visit you yesterday  
so I could see you and see how my wife  
and children are sending me emails wanting  
to know what happened.  
Please also give my love to the local  
newspapers, the mayor and anyone who had  
a camera.  
If you get a chance I would like to make  
contact with the old people who saw the  
crash and the plane go over the house.  
I am asking the government to consider a  
bounty award for anyone who can help  
me with my research. I would really like to  
know what happened to the plane and the  
people on board.  
I wish I could see the plane and the people  
on board.  
Thank you once again  
Peter



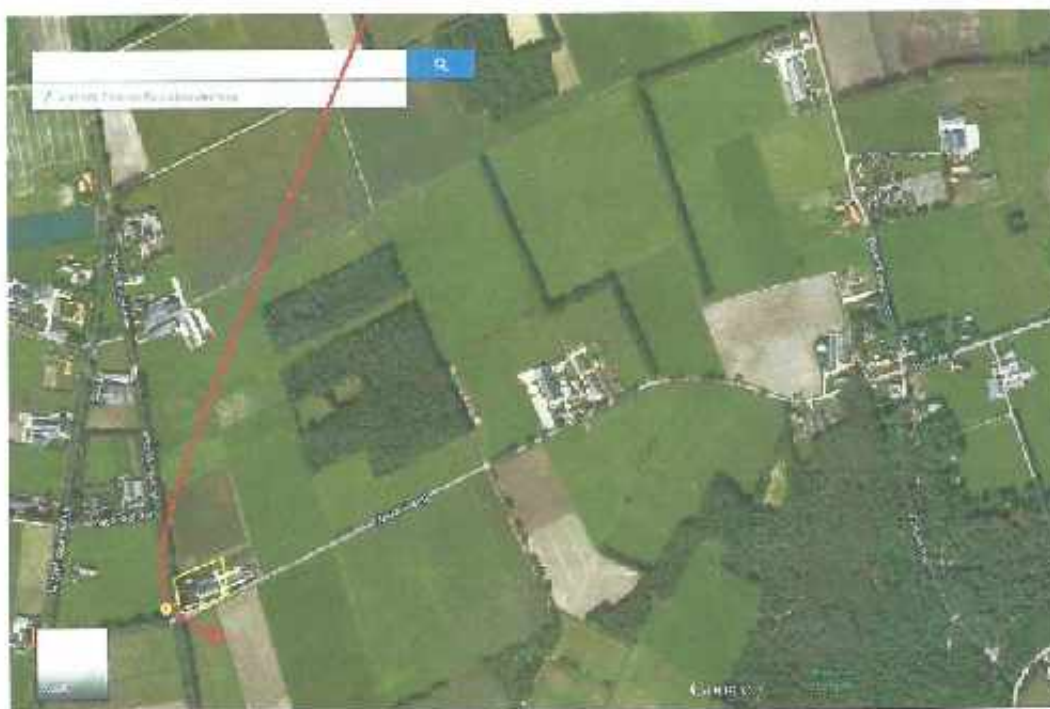


## Attachment 15 – Verhoeven family statement

**VERKLARING VAN KINDEREN VERHOEVEN (MEUWELWEG 3 – VORSTENBOSCH)****STATEMENT OF CHILDREN VERHOEVEN (MEUWELWEG 3 - VORSTENBOSCH)**

Op woensdagmiddag 20 september 1944 kwam tegen vier uur een vliegtuig vanuit het noorden aangevlogen richting de boerderij van de familie Verhoeven. Het vliegtuig vloog op nog geen dertig meter hoogte. Op de onderstaande plattegrond is de baan van het vliegtuig aangegeven door een rode lijn. De boerderij van Bertus en Door Verhoeven en hun vijf kinderen staat bij de kruising van de Meuwelweg en de Brakkesedijk (linksonder in het gele vierkant). Tegenover de boerderij aan de andere kant van de Brakkesedijk was de bleekweide (geel rondje), waar de was in de zon werd gelegd om te bleken.

*Wednesday September 20, 1944, it's almost four o'clock in the afternoon when an airplane came flying from the north towards the farm of the Verhoeven family. The plane was at a height of barely thirty meters. On the map below the trajectory of the aircraft is indicated by a red line. The farm of Bertus and Door (Theodora) Verhoeven and their five children is at the intersection of the Meuwelweg and Brakkesedijk (bottom left in the yellow square). Opposite the farmhouse on the other side of the Brakkesedijk was the bleachfield (yellow circle), where laundry was laid in the sun to whiten.*



Betsy (5 jaar) was op de bleekweide aan het helpen met het binnenhalen van de was. Ze waren daar met zo'n vier mensen aan het werk, waaronder moeder Door en waarschijnlijk hulp Neelie Donkers. Zij zien het vliegtuig aankomen vanuit de richting Nistelrode (Achterstraat), de linkervleugel staat helemaal in brand. Op het moment dat ze het vliegtuig zien, slaan ze op de vlucht richting Nistelrodesedijk naar Ome Frans Verhoeven, die aan het eind van de Meuwelweg aan de Nistelrodesedijk woont.

*Betsy (5 years) was on the bleachfield helping with picking up the laundry. They were there with about four people to work, including mother Door and probably Neelie Donkers, the domestic help. They see the plane coming from the direction of Nistelrode (Achterstraat), the left wing is surrounded with fire. The moment they see the plane, they flee towards the Nistelrodesedijk to Uncle Frans Verhoeven, who lives at the end of the Meuwelweg on the Nistelrodesedijk.*



Miet (10 jaar), Mien (9 jaar), Tannie (7 jaar) en Toon (6 jaar) hebben ook allemaal het vliegtuig brandend aan zien komen en uiteindelijk zien neerstorten. Zij weten zich niet meer te herinneren wat zij op dat moment aan het doen waren of waar ze exact stonden. Vader Bertus was waarschijnlijk binnen de dieren aan het voeren.

Het vliegtuig vloog heel laag over de Brakkesedijk en over de bleekweide. Het vliegtuig maakte een bocht en kwam voor de boerderij aan de andere kant van de Meuwelweg terecht in een akker, kort bij een inmiddels verdwenen bosrand. Er was een explosie en er woedde een brand. Een deel van de bosrand stond ook in brand. Niemand heeft gezien dat het vliegtuig nog een optrekkende beweging heeft gemaakt.

Ongeveer een uur na het neerstorten waren twee of drie nonnen uit Vorstenbosch ter plekke om de lichamen uit het wrak te halen. Betsy en moeder Door zijn toen nog kort (ca. 25 meter) van het wrak gaan kijken en zagen de krater die ontstaan was.

Niemand herinnert zich of er na het neerstorten Duitsers zijn geweest bij het vliegtuigwrak. Wel weten ze dat er tijdens de bevrijding, korte tijd later, Engelse parachutisten geland zijn op de bleekweide en dat er Engelse militairen met tanks gepost hebben bij hun boerderij. Van de soldaten kregen de kinderen koekjes.

Als gevolg van het neerstorten van het vliegtuig ontstonden er scheuren in de muren van de boerderij en sneuvelden er verschillende ramen. De verzekering heeft daarna nog 1400 gulden uitgekeerd om de schade te vergoeden.

*Miet (10 years), Mien (9 years), Tannie (7 years) and Toon (6 years) all have seen the burning plane flying towards them and eventually crash into the ground. They do not remember what they were doing at the time or where they were exactly at that moment. Father Bertus was probably inside the farm building to feed the animals.*

*The plane flew very low over the Brakkesedijk and over the bleachfield. The plane made a turn and crashed on the other side of the Meuwelweg, opposite of the farm in a field, close to a now vanished strip of forest. There was an explosion and a fire raged. Part of the forest was also on fire. Nobody has seen any upward movements of the plane.*

*About an hour after the crash there were two or three nuns from Vorstenbosch to retrieve the bodies from the wreckage. Then Betsy and mother Door had a quick look near (about 25 yards) the wreckage and they saw the crater that was created.*

*Nobody can recall that they have seen German soldiers at the wreck site. They remember that during the liberation, a couple of days later, British paratroopers landed on the bleachfield. They also remember that British soldiers were posting with tanks posted at their farm. The kids got cookies from the soldiers.*

*As a result of the plane crash cracks arose in the walls of the farmhouse and several windows were broken. The insurance subsequently has paid 1400 guilders to compensate the damage.*

Opgetekend door Marcel Steenbakkers d.d. 28 oktober 2014 uit monde van:

Miet Vogels – Verhoeven  
Oudedijk 40 A  
Odiliapeel  
Geboren: 24 september 1933

*Miet Vogels*

Mien van den Heuvel – Verhoeven  
Dintherseweg 35  
5388 VE Nistelrode  
Geboren: 26 september 1934

*Mien van den Heuvel Verhoeven*

Tonnie van de Schans – Verhoeven  
Bergstraat 1  
5375 KK Reek  
Geboren: 6 mei 1937

*Tonnie van de Schans Verhoeven*

Toon Verhoeven  
Nistelrodesedijk 6  
5476 VJ Vorstenbosch  
Geboren: 18 april 1938

*Toon Verhoeven*

Betsy Steenbakkers – Verhoeven  
Bolstweg 18  
5464 TC Mariaheide  
Geboren: 23 mei 1939

*Betsy Steenbakkers Verhoeven*

## Attachment 16 – Smolenaer brothers statement

**Statement from the Smolenaer brothers – received November 2014**

*Beste Peter ,*

*Hier een verhaal van twee jongens uit Vorstenbosch ,toen 11 en 12 jaar oud ,die U willen vertellen wat zij hebben gezien op een Woensdagmiddag 20 September in 1944.*

*Op die middag waren wij op het veld voor de boerderij van Jan Van Uden aardappelen aan het rapen.*

*Het was ongeveer 5 uur in de middag toen wij uit Noordelijke richting ,dus vanuit richting Nistelrode ,een brandend vliegtuig zagen naderen.*

*Wij zagen mensen per parachute het vliegtuig verlaten.*

*Maar volgens ons sprongen er iets later nog meer mensen ,maar het vliegtuig was toen al zo laag ,zodat ze door het vliegtuig werden meegezogen.*

*Het vliegtuig ,dat steeds meer hoogte verloor , kwam recht richting de boerderij van Bertus Verhoeven , een gezin van 7 personen.*

*Op het laatste moment is het de piloot, die dus niet uit het vliegtuig was gesprongen, gelukt het vliegtuig iets op te trekken, zodat het maar net over de boerderij vloog.*

*De piloot heeft naar onze mening ,door zijn eigen leven te geven, het leven van het gezin Verhoeven gered.*

*Op nog geen honderd meter voorbij de boerderij is het vliegtuig toen neergestort .*

*Wij waren op amper 200 meter ,zie situatieschets ,van de plaats waar het vliegtuig neerkwam.*

*Wij zijn ,jong als we waren , en geen gevaar kende, meteen richting het vliegtuig gelopen maar moesten op ongeveer 50 meter van het vliegtuig in een sloot dekking zoeken voor al de munitie die ontplofte.*

*De tijd erna gingen we elke dag even kijken naar de plaats waar het vliegtuig was gevallen .*

*Wij hebben toen ook gezien hoe zuster Emmanuel , die wij goed kende, de stoffelijke resten, een voet in een schoen een hand ,en veel meer resten verzamelde in een kist.*

*Wij zijn blij dat wij nu na 70 jaar aan U ons verhaal nog kunnen vertellen.*

*Wij vinden dat de piloot van dit vliegtuig alleen al voor deze heldendaad , die hij met zijn leven heeft moeten bekopen, alsnog de hoogste onderscheiding heeft verdiend.*

*Mede door het heldhaftig optreden van deze zeer jonge Australische piloot kunnen wij al vele jaren in vrijheid leven.*

*Dear Peter ,*

*Here's a story of two boys from VorstenBosch , then 11 and 12 years old, who want to tell you what they have seen on Wednesday 20 September 1944 .*

*On that afternoon we were on the field for the farm of Jan Van Uden potatoes to the turnips.*

*It was about five o'clock in the afternoon when we looked out toward the north, so from the direction Nistelrode , a burning plane approaching .*

*We saw people leave the aircraft by parachute.*

*But in our little later jumped more people, but the plane was already so low, so they were sucked into the plane.*

*The plane, an increasing amount lost, came right towards the farm of Bertus Verhoeven, a family of 7 people.*

*At the last moment it is the pilot, who had not jumped out of the plane, managed to draw something, so it just flew over the farm. Plane*

*The pilot, in our opinion, by giving his own life, the life of the family Verhoeven saved.*

*The plane is less than one hundred meters past the farm when crashed.*

*We were less than 200 meters, see situation sketch of the place where the plane came down .*

*We are young as we were, and knew no danger, walked straight to the plane but had about 50 meters of the aircraft in a ditch for cover for all the ammunition exploded.*

*The time we went after each day's look at the place where the plane had fallen.*

*We then also seen Sister Emmanuel , whom we knew well, the remains, a foot in a shoe by hand , and much more remains collected in a coffin.*

*We are pleased to be able to tell you now after 70 years our story.*

*We believe that the pilot of this aircraft still has earned. The highest award alone for this heroic act , he had to pay with his life ,*

*We can live for many years partly due to the heroic efforts of these very young Australian pilot in freedom.*

*Finally MAURICE McHugh THANKS ON BEHALF OF THE ENTIRE POPULATION OF VORSTENBOSCH*

*With cordial greetings from VorstenBosch*

*The Brothers Toin and Jan Smolenaers*



Tot slot MAURICE McHUGH BEDANKT NAMENS HEEL  
DE BEVOLKING VAN VORSTENBOSCH  
Met de hartelijke groeten uit Vorstenbosch  
De Gebroeders Toin en Jan Smolenaers





## Attachment 17 – Letter of support



Burgemeester BERNHEZE

Directorate of Honours and Awards  
CP2-1, Department of Defence  
PO Box 7952  
CANBERRA ACT 2610  
AUSTRALIA

7 January 2015

Your Ref DHA 14/447926

VERZONDEN 07.01.15

Dear Sir/Madam

**Pilot Officer Maurice McHugh (410858)**

I wish to offer this letter of support on behalf of the small community of Vorstenbosch in the Netherlands towards the recognition of the bravery of Australian Pilot Officer Maurice McHugh.

The liberation of the Netherlands after four years of German occupation in WW2 by allied troops during "Operation Market Garden" is very significant to our country. We understand that Pilot Officer McHugh was one of only a handful of Australians involved and we would like to acknowledge his contribution to our freedom and especially the significance to the municipality Bernheze.

The actions of Pilot Officer McHugh flying his Short Stirling Bomber on 21 September 1944 are well documented in the Typhoon museum at the nearby Royal Dutch Airforce Base Volkel. Details of his bravery and wreckage of the crashed aircraft including a propeller that was later salvaged in 1977 are on display.

We understand that after being hit by flak and with the plane on fire Pilot Officer McHugh and the crew continued courageously on their mission to resupply beleaguered British troops attempting to capture the bridge at Arnhem.

Furthermore, upon banking out to return to England the plane was again hit by flak and the wing exploded into flame. The plane continued flying for about 50km to crash near our small village of Vorstenbosch.





Burgemeester BERNHEZE

Significantly Pilot Officer McHugh refused a parachute and stayed valiantly with the controls of the stricken plane to allow others of his crew to escape. The three airmen who parachuted to safety were rescued and hidden from the Germans by members of the local resistance movement and their families still remember the events today.

Pilot Officer McHugh and the remaining members of his crew were killed when the plane crashed.

Vorstenbosch village residents and eye witnesses Jan and Toon Smolenaers tell of how they were working in a nearby field with their stepfather and clearly saw Pilot Officer McHugh pull up the burning aircraft at the last minute to avoid hitting the Verhoeven family home at Meuwelweg 3 before crashing. Jan and Toon are adamant that his actions undoubtedly saved the family of seven living in the house. The Verhoeven children who still live in the area also tell of the crash on that day and acknowledge that they are lucky to be alive because of his actions.

The crash site and the actions of the pilot remain relevant to this day and represent an important touchstone for our community that has commemorated these events for many years. Allied airmen and liberation of the Netherlands in 1944 are part of our modern cultural identity. They are studied as part of the local school curriculum in the same way that the landings at Gallipoli in 1915 are significant to Australian children. The historic village windmill is placed into mourning position to honour their bravery by its custodian Jan Smolenaers each September.

We were delighted this year on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle to have Pilot Officer McHugh's nephew Peter McHugh come especially from Australia to visit us along with the Brigadier Bill Sowry, the Australian Defence Attaché from London. They were met by about 50 members of our townsfolk, local school children, Alderman Rien Wijdeven from the municipality Bernheze and Chief Warrant Officer Gerard Veenhuis representing the commander of the local Dutch Air Force Base Volkel. They held a small ceremony and wreath laying at the crash site.

The visit was covered by local Dutch print media and an Australian TV news crew.

The plaque that Peter left with us has now been proudly mounted in our council chambers after a special meeting in December as a permanent memorial to the airmen. The Australian flag and photo of Pilot Officer McHugh that Peter gave to the school children are displayed in their classroom. The school gave Peter a book a small drawings from each child on what the war and liberation meant to them.



Burgemeester BERNHEZE

We offer this letter of support in the hope that you will look favourably upon some kind of belated recognition for Pilot Officer McHugh. It would mean a great deal to his family, to our small community of Vorstenbosch and to the people of the Netherlands.

Yours sincerely

Marieke Moorman  
Burgemeester  
Municipality Bernheze

Copy to:  
Mrs Annemieke Ruigrok  
Ambassador, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands  
120 Empire Circuit  
Yarralumla ACT 2600  
AUSTRALIA



## Attachment 18 – The plaque

## Operation Market Garden

In memory of the pilot and crew of RAF Short Stirling Bomber LX458 from 620 Squadron Fairford England.

Crashed near this site at 1700 hrs on Wednesday 20 September 1944 after being hit by flak.

On a mission to resupply British troops at Arnhem.

Maurice McHugh *	Pilot Officer	Pilot	Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF)
Eric Bradshaw *	Flight Sergeant	Wireless Operator	Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (RAFVR)
Thomas Vickers *	Sergeant	Rear Gunner	Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (RAFVR)
John Waring *	Lance Corporal	Dispatcher	Royal Army Service Corps (RASC)
Ernest Heckford *	Driver	Dispatcher	Royal Army Service Corps (RASC)
D P Evans *	Sergeant	Flight Engineer	Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (RAFVR)
J G Hume *	Flight Sergeant	Navigator	Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (RAFVR)
N Gasgoyne *	Flight Sergeant	Bomb Aimer	Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (RAFVR)

- \* killed - buried at the Canadian War Cemetery at Groesbeek
- \* missing - memorial panel at the Canadian War Cemetery at Groesbeek
- \* parachuted out - a waded capture

Plaque presented by Peter McHugh, nephew of Maurice McHugh, on behalf of his family from Australia - September 2014.