

Hoppy Hopkins - Tail End Charlie . . .



The wartime life of Pilot Officer

Percival Gerald Hopkins

Born 19 March 1914 Died 27 August 1942

Foreword

This record of Percy Hopkins' personal life and his World War 2 service as an Air Gunner in the Royal Air Force was originally written by Doug Andrews in 1982. Doug was an ex-RAF Serviceman who worked for British Airways, and became close friends with Percy's son, John, at that time the publisher of weekly newspaper Airline World.

Percy died in action on the night of 27 August 1942 when the Halifax bomber, in which he was rear gunner, was shot down near Haaksbergen, Holland. His son, John, was born on that same day. Percy's Halifax bomber was one of 289 Allied aircraft in the bombing sortie that night. Thirty aircraft did not return from the sortie.

Andrews extensively researched RAF and Luftwaffe records to compile this record for Percy's family. Andrews's research included details of training of aircrew in 1940-42.

The details of the shooting down of the Halifax, and the burial of the crew in Haaksbergen were provided by various kind people from Haaksbergen, notably Han Brummelman, Harold Pot, Erik Schaddelee and Adrian van Zantvoort.

Official confirmation of the operation on 27 August was given by Rob Davis.

My grateful thanks to all involved for helping me to put together the final years of my father's life, and finally achieve closure . . .

John Corbould-Warren

Hoppy Hopkins - Tail End Charlie ...

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PG Hopkins - his war story . . .

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Pilot Officer Percy (Hoppy) Hopkins - his war . . .

The Sprog

The Royal Air Force Depot at Uxbridge stands at one end of the town's High Street, the tree-lined roads of the 10-acre site dotted with barrack blocks, messes, offices, stores buildings, their red brick now mellowed by the weather of the 60 seasons which have passed since they were built.

RAF
UXBRIDGE



It is the home of the the Queen's Colour Squadron of the Royal Air Force Regiment, the service's drill-display team, many of the airmen and women who work in the RAF's installations in and around London, some of the service's many itinerant technicians - and a large body of brasslunged drill instructors. Of the hundreds of thousands of RAF personnel who have spent some of their service at Uxbridge, arguably the most famous was Lawrence of Arabia, who sought anonymity there as Aircraftman 'Ross' during the late 1920s.

Ten years or so after 'Ross', another young man came to Uxbridge: his name was Percival Gerald Hopkins.

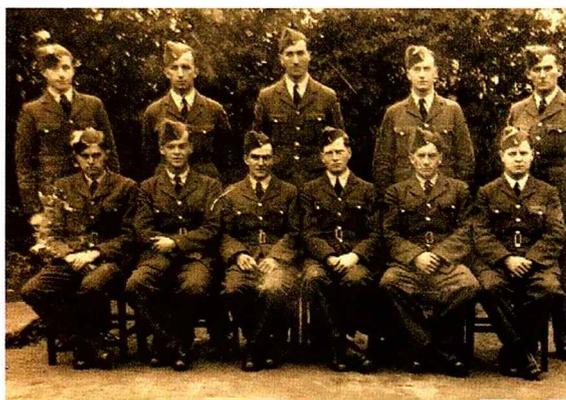
17th August 1940 was hot and sunny. WWII was all but one year old. In the sky above London and the Home Counties, the Battle of Britain was reaching its climax, as "The Few" of Fighter Command denied Hitler's Luftwaffe mastery of the air, and allowed the British Army, battered after the humiliation of Dunkirk, to re-arm and re-form.

During this period, the Royal Air Force was expanding from its peacetime establishment of about 120,000 to its wartime peak of over 1,100,000, and among the many young men who passed through the gates of the Uxbridge Depot on 17th August 1940 was Percy Hopkins, then just a day or two short of being 26 years and five months old.

He left at home his wife - Peggy - who was six months pregnant with their daughter, Cherry (now known as Mickey) who was to be born on 14th November.

After a medical examination - "*Breathe in... and out. Good. Cough. OK, next.*" - Percy and his fellow recruits took the Bible in their left hand, raised their right and swore allegiance to: "His Majesty King George, his ministers and those set in authority over me..."

It must have been at about this time that the kind, helpful NCOs who had been showing the recruits around Uxbridge suddenly turned into bellowing demons: "Right get fell in. Quick march lef, ri', lef, ri' - Halt." A ferocious haircut, an issue of kit including scratchy serge uniforms, iron boots, blankets, cutlery, socks, Sweaters and a rifle, transformed Mr. P.G. Hopkins, civilian, into No. 1262624 Aircraftman 2nd Class



Sprogs . . . PG Hopkins centre top row

Hopkins, P. G., "Enlisted for the duration of the present emergency as Aircraftman/ Wireless Operator, on a weekly wage of about £1/5/- (£1.25) per week.

From that August day until the beginning of October 1940, Percy Hopkins and his friends underwent that refined form of harassment/brainwashing/misery known by all members of the British armed forces as "Square Bashing". Everything had to be done immediately if not sooner, there were hours and tedious hours of marching about on the drill-square and if they weren't marching, they were "Doubling (running in parade formation).

There were umpteen fiddling and fatuous rules and regulations which had to be obeyed as though they were Holy Writ, and

any airman whose boots didn't dazzle, whose buttons didn't gleam, or whose barrack-room bed-space was defiled by even a single grain of dust wound up on a 'Fizzer' - a charge- which invariably led to a dose of 'Jankers'-Defaulters' punishment.

On 10th October, the RAF sent Percy Hopkins to the sea-side, to Blackpool - but not for a holiday.

The Wireless Operator/Air Gunner

At the outbreak of hostilities, a number of holiday camps in places like Skegness, Clacton and Prestatyn were taken over and used, the happy pre-war cry of "Hi-de-hi" giving way to the bellow of "Left-Right-Left-Right"

No.10 (Signals) Recruit Centre was in Blackpool: the recruits lived either in converted holiday camps, or requisitioned boarding-houses, presided over by landladies who were tougher and grimmer than any RAF Drill Instructor. The training at Blackpool, in addition to the eternal 'square-bashing', now included the rudiments of wireless and radio-telegraphy, Morse Code and a certain amount of weapons training, for by now - December 1940 - Percy Hopkins had 'remustered' - changed trade - to Aircrafthand/Wireless Operator/Air Gunner.

On 17th January 1941, his 'square-bashing' and elementary radio training behind him, Percy Hopkins was again on the move, this time to No.2 Signals School at Yatesbury in Wiltshire. It was here that he finished his training as a Wireless Operator and began in earnest to master his other trade, that of Air Gunner.

On 13th April 1941, the right sleeve of his uniform decorated with the 'Sparks' badge worn even to this day by all RAF Electronics and Signals personnel, Percy Hopkins was off to yet another training school, this time to No. 1 Flying Training School (FTS) some 20-odd miles south of Yatesbury across the rolling Salisbury Plain, at Netheravon.



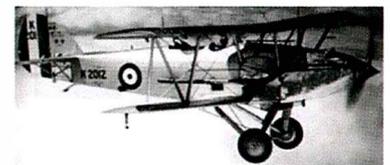
Here he learned about trajectories, deflection shooting and the thousand and one secrets of the black art of Air Gunnery.

He would have been taught how to strip, clean and assemble a machine gun, clear stop-pages and how to assemble a belt of ammunition.

He would have begun to learn

the rudiments of air gunnery in a dome-shaped Gunnery Trainer building, taking shots with a camera-gun at images projected on the circular walls.

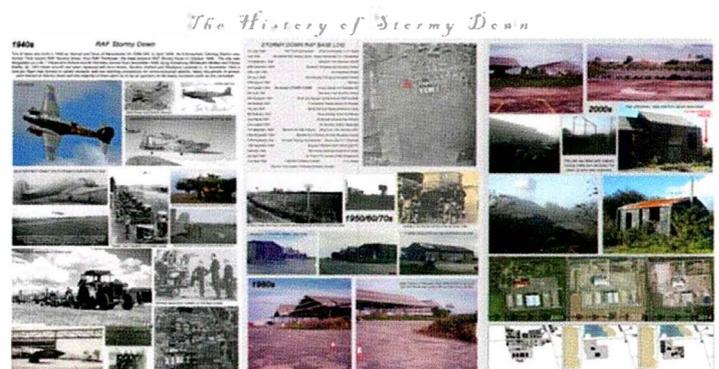
It would have been at about this time that he flew for the first time, probably in the rear cockpit of a Hawker Hart trainer, swivelling the hand-operated machine gun at target aircraft which obligingly stayed in formation.



After five months at Netheravon, Percy Hopkins went back to Yatesbury for a further four weeks Wireless Operator training, before being posted to No. 7 Air Gunnery School at RAF Stormy Down, in Glamorgan, South Wales, for advanced gunnery training.

He spent six weeks in Wales, from early October to mid November 1941, and his 'live' flying experience was now in 'fast' aircraft - like the Fairey Battle day-bomber, which, with a maximum speed of 241 mph was a considerable advance on the se-date Harts at Netheravon.

He would also have spent some time trundling around in 7 AGS's lumbering Armstrong-Whitworth Whitley bombers, training on their two-gun power-operated Frazer-Nash gun turrets.



Pilot Officer - First Post - to 142 Squadron

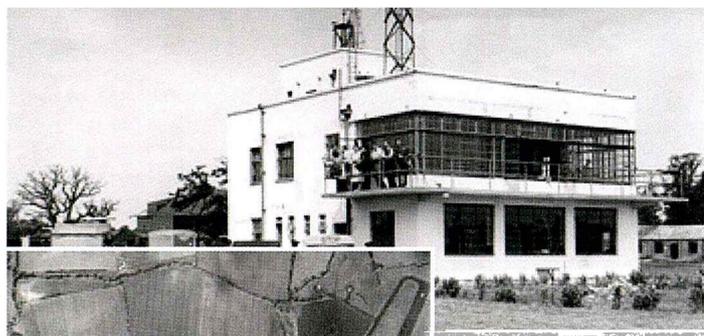
Hopkins had applied for, and was granted a commission, which came through as he was under training at Stormy Down. Unlike the practice in today's RAF, where an officer who is commissioned from the ranks retains his original service number and continues his service uninterrupted, the custom in 1941 was to discharge them from the ranks of the Royal Air Force and commission them immediately into the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (RAFVR) for the duration of hostilities.



Thus it was that at 23:59 hrs on 7th November 1941, 1262624 Temporary Sergeant Hopkins, P. G. ceased to exist, and two minutes later, at 00:01 hrs on 8th November 1941, he was 'born again' as 111241 Pilot Officer (Probationary) P. G. Hopkins, RAFVR. One can only speculate as to what he was doing as he left the 'Other Ranks' to become an Officer and a Gentleman. Perhaps he was out celebrating his promotion, perhaps he was sleeping peacefully in his billet at Stormy Down.

Although he was now officially at least, a Reservist, it made no difference to his eventual operational status. He was as proficient an Air Gunner as any RAF Regular, indeed he was probably above average. The mere fact of his commission showed that he was someone rather special, for gunnery was a 'Sergeants' Trade' and commissioned Air Gunners were rare birds indeed. Not only that, but there were signs, as we shall see, that the RAF was grooming Percy Hopkins for higher things.

In the meantime, there was the remainder of his training as a Air Gunner to be got through, and by 18th November 1941, he had 'passed out' and was henceforward entitled to wear the 'AG brevet on the left breast of his uniform tunic. But, qualified Air Gunner though he was, he wasn't yet combat-ready. Before that, he faced yet another posting to yet another training unit.



No. 23 Operational Training Unit (OTU) at Pershore, near Worcester, was, as its name suggests, tasked with the job of taking newly-qualified aircrew and training them to combat proficiency on particular aircraft types, before sending them off to front-line squadrons.



For a service as rigidly-organised as the wartime RAF, the process of 'crewing-up' was an amazingly casual one. Newly-arrived trainees were left entirely to their own devices to choose their future operational comrades. Newly-arrived OTU trainees would be assembled in one of the training hangars and left to get on with it. A pilot might wander about, picking up a navigator, bomb-aimer or flight engineer here, and a brace of gunners there, or maybe one or other crewman would round up his own crew. It was, as someone who went through the process once described it: "a cross between a slave-market and a marriage bureau."

Once 'crewed up', training began in earnest, and it was at No. 23 OTU during the bitter winter of 1941/42 that Percy Hopkins and his new friends came to terms with the Vickers Wellington medium bomber. Finally, 18 months of training after joining the RAF at Uxbridge, Percy Hopkins became a fully-fledged, but as yet unblooded 'Bomber Baron', when he and his crew were posted to No. 142 Squadron at Grimsby in Lincolnshire - 'Bomber Country'.



Elsham Wolds - 103 Squadron

It was to one of these often dismal establishments, RAF Grimsby, just five miles from the town with which it shared a name, that Pilot Officer Hopkins journeyed in the Spring of 1942.

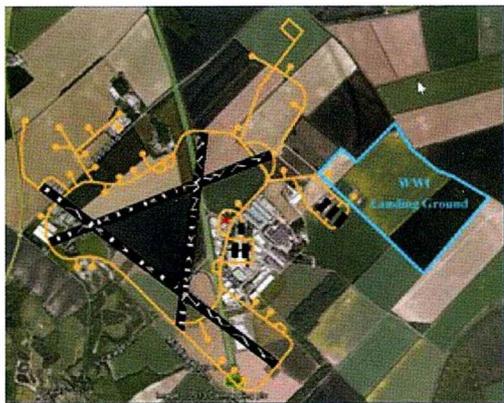
He was posted to No. 142 Sqdn, then flying Wellington Mk.IVs, but his tour of duty with 142 was to be a short one, for on 30th April 1942, after barely three weeks at RAF Grimsby, he packed his bags and set off to join what was to be his last unit, No. 103 Sqdn at RAF Elsham Wolds.

He was granted leave for a quick visit to see his 18-month old daughter Cherry - and his wife Peggy, by now 5 months pregnant with their son (John).

103 Sqdn had moved to Elsham Wolds in July of the previous year, and 103 was destined to spend the remainder of the war at the north Lincolnshire airfield.

Elsham Wolds

The wide expanse of grazing pasture on Elsham Wolds, lying some nine miles south of Hull on the Lincolnshire side of the Humber, was first utilised as an airfield in 1916 when No.33 Squadron, RFC, was deployed to counter the Zeppelins coming in over the Lincolnshire coast during their night raids on the Midlands.



Elsham Wolds - then

In July 1941 No.103 Squadron and its Wellingtons arrived for operations, the first sorties from Elsham Wolds being flown on the 24th.

In the following spring the squadron began conversion to Halifax's.

However, this association was brief for no sooner had No.103 taken the Halifax to battle in July 1942, than 1 Group embarked on all Lancaster re-equipment and by October the Halifax's had been withdrawn.



Elsham Wolds - now

Only one other Bomber Command squadron had a longer association with one airfield during wartime than No.103 Squadron for it remained at Elsham Wolds until six months after VE-Day. No.103 Squadron is credited with more operational sorties than any other 1 Group squadron but consequently it suffered the group's highest losses and of the 248 bombers lost on operations while flying from Elsham Wolds, 198 were from No.103 Squadron. Of the 248 total, 28 comprised Wellingtons, 12 Halifax's and 208 Lancaster's. One Elsham Wolds Lancaster, ED888, which served with both Nos.103 and 576, held the Bomber Command record for operational sorties having completed 140 between May 1943 and December 1944.

RAF Elsham Wolds was closed in 1947. The history of the site is reflected in the road names on the estate which include Halifax Approach and Wellington Way.

In 1970s, the new A15 dual carriageway road linking the M180 with the Humber Bridge was taken across the old airfield site. During the same period a water treatment works was built near the A15.

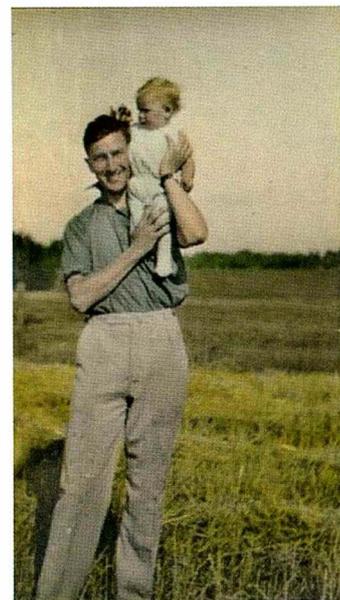


When Percy Hopkins joined the squadron, it was equipped with Wellington Mk.Ic medium bombers and commanded by Wing Commander J FH du Boulay.

As part of No. 1 Group Bomber Command, 103 Sqdn was engaged night bombing operations against the Third Reich, and it was after less than a week with his new unit that Percy Hopkins went to war for the first time.

By now he had teamed up with the 103 Sqdn crew, which, with occasional 'stand-ins', he would fight his war.

The crew for that first mission, a raid on Stuttgart on 6th May 1942, were: Pilot : Flying Officer J. R. Frith
 Navigator : Pilot Officer R. E. Glensor Bomb Aimer/Front Gunner : Sergeant G. H. Wilson
 Wireless Operator/Air Gunner : Sergeant S. Albiston Rear Gunner : Pilot Officer P. G. Hopkins.



Being a 'Sprog Crew", they took an extra crew-member that night. Sergeant B. J. Standiland, an experienced operational pilot, rode with the newcomers as guide and mentor. Although out-ranked by Frith, Standiland was in command of the aircraft.

Two minutes before ten o'clock that May evening, they took off in Wellington Mk.Ic, serial number DV 699, squadron code letters 'PM-N', laden with a single 250 lb., high-explosive bomb and 750 gallons of aviation gasoline. Their first en route check-point was Orfordness, on the Suffolk coast. From there, 'N-Nuts' was due to cross the French coast just north of Dunkirk on its way to Stuttgart. But the electrical magneto on the Wellington's starboard engine had failed, so, 20 miles off Orfordness, Standiland turned the Wellington around and headed back to Elsham Wolds, where it and its bitterly disappointed crew landed a little after two o'clock in the morning.

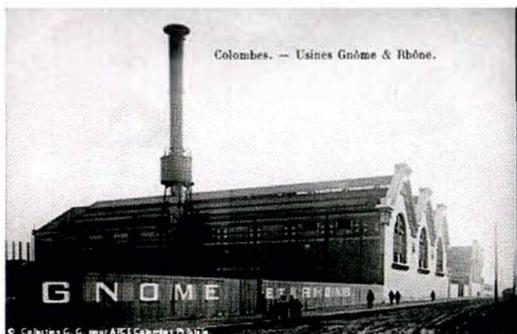


(But if Hopkins' first sortie had been a wash-out, another of 103's 'Sprog Crews', flying "V-Victor, with Flight Lieutenant Saxelby as "Uncle' was having a far more dramatic taste of war at first hand.

As the squadron's Operations Record Book laconically noted: "Flt. Lt. Saxelby's aircraft was hit by flak in the starboard engine at 01:00 hrs over Karlsruhe. The dinghy was set on fire, the glow being reflected on the starboard engine nacelle. This led the captain to believe that the aircraft was on fire, and he switched off the motor.

The fire died down after 15 minutes, and the aircraft returned safely, having jettisoned its bombs live over enemy territory. Later examination showed that the aircraft had been hit by an incendiary bomb dropped by a friendly aircraft, and not by flak.")

Three weeks later they tried again. On this occasion, the orders from No.1 Group HQ were short and to the point. Four of 103's Wellingtons were: To destroy the Gennevilliers/Gnome Rhone Factory near Paris.



By now, Hopkins' crew had been allocated their 'own' Wellington, R1163, "P-Peter', but they were still 'Sprogs', so once again they took an extra pilot with them, and it was the squadron's Commanding Officer, Wing Cdr. du Boulay, who led them to their target, an important aero-engine factory.

On this short Summer night, their take off was late, so as to avoid enemy flak and nightfighters. They fought not only the enemy but the weather on that sortie: the weather was bad as they left Elsham at 23:31 hrs, and it worsened, with thick cloud and electrical storms all the way to the target.



When they reached Paris, the cloud was too thick for "P-Peter's' crew to be able to find the factory, and du Boulay circled for 45 minutes looking for the aiming-point - a bend in the River Seine - before giving up.

The fruitless search over Paris had used up too much fuel for the Wellington to be able to return to Elsham Wolds, and at 05:15 hrs on the morning of 30th May, "P-Peter and its weary, frustrated crew landed at the RAF fighter station at West Malling, near Maidstone in Kent.

Wing Cdr du Boulay went with "P-Peter's' crew on their third raid, and so made a small contribution to one of the momentous events of the war.

The Thousand Bomber raids

In February 1942, a new Commander-in-Chief of Bomber Command took office. Air Vice Marshal Sir Arthur Harris - known as 'Butch' by his friends, 'Butcher' by his enemies, and 'Bomber' by his crew, who worshipped him- was appointed to his new command at a crucial point in its history. Until then, Bomber Command had shown no apparent ability to destroy Nazi Germany by bombing, and with increasingly urgent calls for aircraft to protect the Atlantic convoys, then being severely mauled by German U-Boats, there was a very real possibility that Bomber Command might be segmented to undertake more immediately urgent roles. Harris decided to mount three ultra-heavy attacks on key German cities - Bremen, Cologne and Essen - using 1000 bombers on each attack. Harris's theory, which proved to be correct, was that the massive propaganda effect of three enormous raids would put paid to any more talk of splitting up Bomber Command. The first thousand-bomber raid was mounted against Cologne on 30th May 1942.

Harris supplemented his squadrons of the line with aircraft from training units, flown by instructors and advanced students. This was a "Max effort sortie, so hundreds of individual aircrew members not flying with the command's squadrons who had - or could dream up - a reason for going on the raid, took part.

Even the Station Commander of Elsham Wolds, Group Captain H. A. Constantine, went along that night, riding with Warrant Officer Spiller and his crew, in Wellington 'X-X-Ray'.



Percy Hopkins and his friends, with their CO in command, were the first away, their Wellington, laden with 2760 lbs of incendiary bombs and 634 gallons of fuel, took off at 22:47 hrs, with the remaining 18 Wellingtons following at two minute intervals.

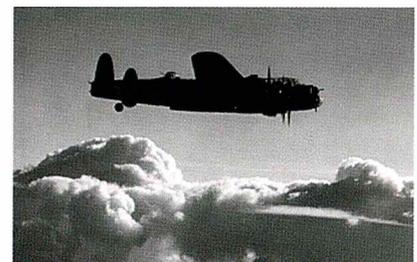
Over the target, the weather, for once, was on their side. In bright moonlight, du Boulay located the aiming-point - close to Cologne Cathedral- and Sgt. Wilson, the Bomb Aimer, released the incendiaries from 12,000 feet. Then it was back to Elsham Wolds, landing at five minutes before four in the morning, for a de-briefing by the Intelligence Officer, the traditional post-raid aircrew meal of bacon and eggs and so to bed, after what Winston Churchill later described as: "The greatest raid in the history of the world."

Two nights later, this time without an 'Uncle, Percy Hopkins and the crew of "P-Peter went to Essen. Everyone hated Essen, situated in the Ruhr. Essen was the heart of Germany's heavy industry - the Krupps armament firm was headquartered there - and if Essen was destroyed, Germany's war-effort was crippled Again and again "Bomber Harris's" crews flew to Essen. They fought there - and many of them died there. With the grim, self-mocking humour of military men down all the ages, Bomber Command's flyers coined a nickname for Essen: they called it "Happy Valley'.

Flying Officer Frith lifted "P-Peter' off the ground at 23:30 hrs. Two and a quarter hours later, Bomb Aimer Wilson called 'Bombs gone, 11,500 feet over "Happy Valley'. When they landed at Elsham Wolds, at a little after 04:30 hrs in the morning, they discovered that the fabric covering of the Wellington's bomb-doors and tail-plane had been punctured by flak-shell splinters. It must have been a thoughtful crew who went to bed that morning.

It was nearly three weeks before No. 103 Sqdn' Peter 1 flew another bombing raid. At all events, they were back on the Battle Order for the night of 25/26th June 1942, taking part in Bomber Command's third Thousand-Bomber raid, on Bremen. 'P-Peter' was the fourth Wellington away that night, leaving Elsham Wolds just after eleven o'clock at night, on the six-hour round-trip to their target.

On their trip to Cologne, they had had clear skies, but Bremen that night lay under an almost unbroken cloud, which prevented the squadron's bomb-aimers from seeing their targets. It also made life easy for the Luftwaffe's night fighters. At about twenty to two in the morning, Flying Officer Frith saw, through a small gap in the clouds, fires burning in a built-up area, which he took to be Bremen, and lining his bomb-sight up on the fires, Sgt. Wilson released "P-Peter's' load of incendiaries from 9000 feet. Then it was home, de-briefing, bacon and eggs - and bed.



From Wellington to Halifax

The raid on Bremen was Percy Hopkins' last 'Op' on the faithful 'Wimpy', for during July of 1942, No. 103 Sqn flew one last Wellington operation, five aircraft to Bremen on the night of 2nd/3rd July. It was a sad 'swan-song' for the 'Wimpy', as of the five aircraft taking part in the raid, only three came back.

For the rest of July, No. 103 Sqn was declared "Non-Operational" as it exchanged its Wellingtons for the bigger, heavier, four-engined Handley-Page Halifax.

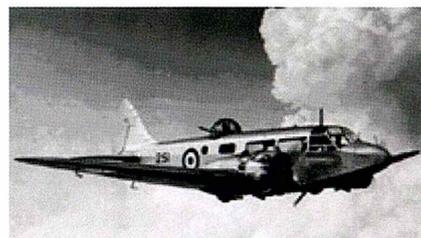


Air and ground-crews alike worked hard and long to master the new aircraft as quickly as possible. There was much, both theoretical and practical, to learn, and there was also a good deal of 'musical aircrews' going on, with individuals being swapped around to make up the larger crews on the new aircraft.

Percy Hopkins played very little part in the early stages of this process: he had gone back to School.

No. 103 Sqn's diary for the period records that: 'P/O P.G. Hopkin (sic) was detached to GGS (Central Gunnery School) Sutton Bridge, for No. 40 Gunnery Leaders Course.'

At Sutton Bridge, just inside the Lincolnshire border, eight miles west of King's Lynn, Hopkins would have gone back to first principles of gunnery, testing his theoretical knowledge in the classrooms and his operations-honed practical skills in sedate Airspeed "Oxford" twin-engined crew-trainers. Having passed the course, he would ultimately have become the top gun of No. 103 or some other squadron, perhaps after a stint as an instructor.



While Percy Hopkins studied at Sutton Bridge, the war rolled on. Back at Elsham Wolds, 103 Sqn was declared "Operational" on the Halifax. On 1st August, they went to Dusseldorf, then they went to Duisburg and back to Dusseldorf. To Osnabruck they went, and to Flensburg. By the end of August, Percy Hopkins was back with 103, and checked out on the Halifax. He rejoined his old crew, flying a brand-new 'P-Peter', Halifax Mk.II, serial number W1224, and on 27th August, he set off on his sixth operational sortie.

.....To Kassel.

A Royal Air Force airfield is like a self-contained community. It has shops, churches, a cinema, factories and workshops, restaurants, houses and bars. It even has an airfield.



It is, in effect, a 'company town', of 1500-2500 inhabitants, and the business of the company, dictated by 'Head Office', is attacking the enemy.

On 27th August 1942, the inhabitants of the 'company town' called RAF Elsham Wolds were preparing for business.

Early that morning, the teleprinters in the Signals Traffic office had tapped out the orders for the night's operation. The orders, which had originated at HQ Bomber Command at High Wycombe, had come via the Headquarters of No. 1 Group, at Bawtry, just south of Doncaster.

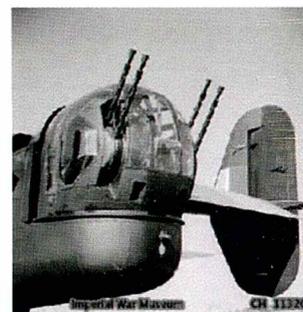
At Elsham Wolds, the Station Commander Grp. Capt. Constantine, would have called a planning conference with

Wing Cdr. du Boulay and all their specialist officers, to plan the means of turning their orders into action.

In the Parachute Section, WAAF's would have been packing "brollies" for the crews, and in the station's mess-kitchens, the cooks would have started making sandwiches for flight rations.

The final sortie - Kassel

In other parts of the station, the endless work of maintaining 103 Sqdn's Halifaxes would be going on, with some of the big bombers being repaired after suffering flak damage and others undergoing routine servicing. In the station bomb dump, the armourers would have begun the sweating drudgery of preparing the night's bomb-loads and manhandling them onto bomb-trolleys to be towed out to the aircraft at their dispersals, before being fused and winched into the bellies of the Halifaxes. Other armourers would have been preparing long belts of machine gun ammunition to feed the aircrafts' turrets.



Shortly before mid-day, the crews of the 12 Halifaxes on tonight's raid-nearly 150 young men - would have crowded into the main briefing room. Most them would have been dressed in comfortable/ casual/functional wear - flying-boots instead of shoes, roll-necked Sweaters instead of shirts. Chattering and joking among themselves, some of them, perhaps would have stolen a glance at the curtain on the wall facing them. Behind it lay the main operations map, and on the map was a red ribbon marking their route to the target. Where was it tonight? Perhaps it was a 'swan' to one of the Channel ports, maybe it was Berlin...? At the back of one or two minds, perhaps, was the unspoken prayer: 'Please, God, don't let it be Essen...'

At a cry of "Ten-shun" from the doorway, the crews would have risen to their feet as the 'StationMaster' and 103 Sqdn's CO entered the room and took their places on the platform.



The curtain over the map would have been drawn back to reveal the red ribbon. From Elsham Wolds, it ran in an almost straight line to Mablethorpe on the Lincolnshire coast, to Edam in Holland and on to Kassel, an industrial town on the junction of the Diemel and Fulda rivers in central Germany. There may have been a moment's silence as they took it in, with maybe a quiet "Phewww" from somewhere in the room which was someone's way of saying: "Well, at least it's not Essen..."

By now the briefing would have begun. "Twelve aircraft to raid Kassel, Gentlemen, the first eight to carry a 5400 lb load of incendiaries, the last four with seven 1000 pound delayed-action bombs. You'll also be dropping 12 bundles of Nickels' (propaganda leaflets) each on Gutersloh, in Westphalia, which lies on your track to the target. There are no alternative targets tonight, you'll all be carrying cameras, so let's have lots of nice sharp photos of your aiming points." Then the Station Commander would have handed over to Wing Cdr. du Boulay for the detailed briefing, and he in turn would have called in the Station Intelligence Officer with news of any new flak concentrations and night fighter operations, then it would have been the Metman's turn, and he promised the crews clear skies, but some fog over the North Sea.

Shortly afterwards, the Main Briefing would have broken up into specialist groups as the navigation, bombing, signals and gunnery leaders conferred with their people on their own aspects of the operation. Then back to their billets for a while, to the mess-halls for a meal, then, singly, or in ones and two, on foot or on rattling RAF issue bikes, they drifted down to the squadron hangar to start the raid.

In the locker room, they dug out their flying boot, jackets and helmets, before starting one of the many little rituals which prefaced a raid. They emptied their pockets of money, letters from home, everything, sealed it in a small canvas bag and gave it to the Intelligence Officer. Even a Grimsby bus ticket, it was claimed, could give the enemy valuable information. No-one believed it, but they emptied their pockets just the same. They collected their parachutes and "Mae West" life-jackets from the WAAFs in the Parachute Section, along with flight-rations and escape kits. Out to the crew trucks, then, all piled in together, a jumble of seven men, parachutes, thermos flasks, briefcases, packets of sandwiches.

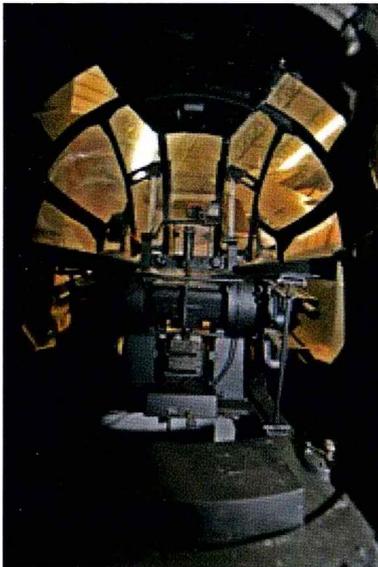
Time perhaps for a quick puff at a cigarette on the drive out to the dispersal, one of many lollipop-shaped concrete hard standings around the perimeter of the airfield.

Women were not welcome at these places, they brought bad luck with them, it was said. On some stations, aircrews even threw stones at WAAFs and NAAFI-girls to drive them away. It would have been "Men Only", then, as Percy Hopkins and his colleagues arrived at their dispersal. Their aircraft would have bulked large in the gathering dark, its twin fins and the blades of its four propellers pointing at the sky. It was painted black on its sides and below its wings and camouflage olive and green on top. On its flanks, the squadron codes-letters 'PM' were on one side of the red-white-and blue RAF roundel - a perfect bulls-eye for German night-fighter pilots to aim at, it was cynically said - and the aircraft's individual code letter, "P-Peter" on the other. The bomb-doors would have hung open, to allow a last-minute check on the load of incendiaries inside.

As the crew-truck drove away, the pilot, James Frith from Newcastle, just 21 years old and newly promoted to Flight Lieutenant, looked through the 'Form 700' - 'P-Peter's' log-book with the senior ground-crew NCO and the flight engineer, Sergeant Wally Duncombe. The bomb-aimer, Sergeant George Wilson, like Frith, a Geordy, took a last look at the weapon load.

The others would have been aboard 'P-Peter' by now, climbing forward up the sloping fuselage to their stations. Perhaps Pilot Officer Edward Briant, navigator, from Richmond, Surrey cursed as he banged his shins on the mainspar of the wing which ran through the dark, windowless fuselage, raising a chuckle from the wireless operator, Flight Sergeant Barry Blundall, a Londoner, from Ealing.

Behind them, Sergeant John Craig, from Dundee, would have been threading himself into the midupper gun turret, and down in the tail, Percy Hopkins stowed his 'chute before climbing into the rear turret and closing the doors behind him. It may well have been a tight fit. Many rear gunners removed a section of the 'Perspex' to improve their view, so with temperatures at 20,000 feet reaching -20°F , frostbite was a regular occurrence.



Estimates for the life expectancy for a WWII rear gunner was the lowest of the Aircrew.

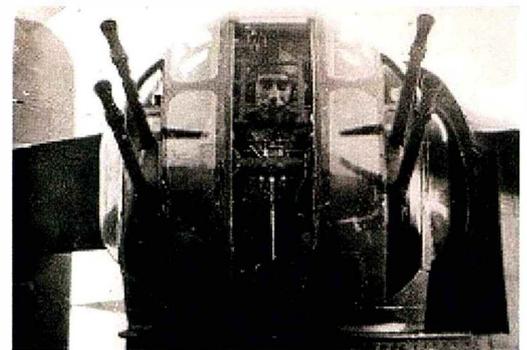
"Tail-end Charlie" was subject to the most violent movements of the aircraft. Squeezed into the cramped metal and perspex cupola, the Rear Gunner had so little leg space that some had to place their flying boots into the turret before climbing in themselves.

Through the entire operation, the Rear Gunner knew that the Luftwaffe fighter pilots preferred to attack from the rear and under the belly of the bomber, so he was often 1st in line for elimination. During WW2 - 20,000 air gunners were killed while serving with Bomber Command."

It was bitterly cold in those tiny turrets and removing the perspex glazing made it colder still - it was -15°F below at 15,000 feet over Germany - so maybe Hopkins was wearing one of the bright yellow, electrically-heated Taylor flying suits, with a built-in "Mae West".

Twelve feet or so forward of Percy Hopkins, Barry Blundall faced precisely the opposite situation. "P-Peters' crude heater was next to his crew-station, and while Percy Hopkins shivered in his Taylor suit, Barry Blundall sweltered in his shirt-sleeves.

As they settled themselves aboard, perhaps they took the chance to check that they'd brought their lucky charms. Most crew-members had something or other, a scarf given by a loved one, a pair of WAAF-issue knickers tucked in a back pocket, a rabbit's foot. Even before boarding "P-Peter", there may have been some rite of passage. Some pilots peed on the wheels of their bombers, one sergeant ritually spat on his Lancaster's fin.



Shortly before nine o'clock, it was time to be rolling, and Frith and Duncombe, in that nasal muffled quacking that men's voices become when smothered by an oxygen-mask, were going through the prestart incantation. They worked their way down the 90-item check-list. "Fuel?" "Contents checked, Master Cocks on, Crossfeed off. Booster Pumps on." "Rad. Shutters?" "Auto.", "Air Intake?" "Cold." "Flaps?" "Set for take-off, 20 degrees." From each engine nacelle in turn, there came a splutter of smoke, then the propeller jerked once, then disappeared into a whirling blur, as 27 litres of RollsRoyce Merlin engine sprang into life. Hydraulic power came on then, and Percy Hopkins and John Craig would have been swinging their turrets around, testing the traverse drives.

A wave from James Frith, and the ground-crew 'Erks' would have whipped the chocks from under the main-wheels. "P-Peter' would have rolled off the dispersal, and, steered with the brakes and bursts Of engine power, would have waddled fatly down to the end of the runway, to join the eleven other 103 Sqn Halifaxes bound for Kassel. Flight Sergeant Tilley was first away, two minutes early, in 'C- Charlje, then Sgt. Dryhurst in 'G-George' and Warrant Officer Telfer in "E-Easy". At last, the green light from the runway control caravan, beckoned "P-Peter' onto the runway.

James Frith would have opened the throttles, the four Merlins bellowing as the Halifax heaved and shuddered against the brakes. A last few checks:"Flaps twenty ... Rich Mixture... props in Fine Pitch. Brakes off." Slowly at first, weighed down by two and a half tons of incendiaries and half a ton of fuel, "P-Peter started to move. With Edward Briant calling the airspeed from his navigator's panel, James Frith's right hand



would have inched the throttles forward, his thumb pushing No. 1 - Port Outer-engine's throttle a little further forward counteracting the Halifax's swing to Port. "Fifty knots..." "P-Peter's' tail was up now, the undercarriage legs extending as the weight came off the wheels onto the wings. "Seventy knots..." came Briant's call; "Full Power..." answered Frith, as he put his right hand on the control wheel, Wally Duncombe's hovering left hand took the throttles and pushed them right forward, where they were held by the friction-lock, flat out at +18lbs of boost, the Merlins were turning at 3000 rpm."

'Snaking' on take off or when taxiing may have been seen as 'normal' and 'under control' by the Pilot and other crew up front, but in the darkness of the rear turret, sitting almost over the tail wheel it was something different! It sometimes felt as if the tail wheel was made of wood - everything at the back end strained, banged, shook and rattled, and it was a tense '*hold on to everything*' for a few moments, including the stomach. Ammunition jostled and rattled in the fuselage as the turret swayed, shook and vibrated it was the closest one could get to being airsick on the ground. When the tail of the aeroplane lifted into the air, one could then 'relax' the tail gunner was first to rise off the runway and last to touch-down.

The rumble of wheels on concrete stopped: "P-Peter was airborne. "Safe flying speed." called Briant from behind, as the Halifax climbed away at 140 knots. Frith raised the undercarriage and the flaps, and Duncombe throttled the engines back to 2500 rpm. P-Peter's' ground-crew and the cluster of wellwishers by the runway's end saw the big machine curving away into the South-west as the gathering darkness swallowed it.



RAF Bomber Command sent 289 aircraft to Kassel on the night of 27th/28th August 1942. The first to arrive over the target were 26 aircraft - Lancasters, Stirlings and Wellingtons - of No.8 'Pathfinder Group, which laid down marker flares for the main force, 263 Hampdens, Halifaxes, Lancasters, Stirlings and Wellingtons from Nos. 1, 3 and 5 Groups. The Halifaxes of No. 103 Sqn were due over Kassel between 23:30 hrs and midnight, having taken something like three hours for the 450-mile flight from Elsham Wolds.

Ranged against them were the searchlights, flak-batteries and night-fighters of the Luftwaffe, these last operating from bases over which the bomber-stream had to pass.



RAF monitoring stations in England identified transmissions between German Fighter- controllers and the Junkers Ju 88s and Messerschmitt Bf 110s of Nacht-Jager Geschwadern (Night-Fighter Wings) One and Two.

NJG2 was stationed at Leeuwarden, in north-western Holland, and NJG 1 was at Twente-Enschede, close to the German border. Between them, they flew 39 sorties that night, carrying out a total of 15 attacks on British bombers, nine of which they claimed as destroyed and two as probably destroyed.

According to a secret German report (Abschussmeldung) Halifax 1270 - P for Peter became the subject of a surprise attack on 27 August 1942 at 23.54 hours at an altitude of 3500 metres, 4 kilometers south of Haaksbergen by the German pilot Wolfgang Thimmig. Chief Thimmig was the Group Commander of III INJ61 (III group of night fighting attack force 1) stationed at airfield Twente.

The plane was attacked by the German night fighter Bf 110 F4. The bomber was discovered by a searchlight from the plane flown by the pilot Chief Wolfgang Thimmig. It traced the Halifax with the "Lichtensteingerat", a sort of onboard radar. On the front of the plane they had attached a system of antennae, which resembled the antlers of a stag. This apparatus – the Lichtensteingerat – was manufactured by the German electronics factory Telefunken.



The main purpose of attacking a bomber is to bring it down before it reaches its target, so the primary target for the fighter pilot is the engines.

According to this report the plane was attacked from behind five times from a distance of about 70 metres, and after the second attack both right side engines of the Halifax were on fire and subsequently exploded. The plane heeled over and crashed into a lightly-wooded peat area, killing all on board.

Pilot James Frith's plane came down in the Buurser peat. Seven bodies were found near the wreckage. The German Wehrmacht were notified immediately and they took charge of all further arrangements.

The next day many people visited the disaster area to view the plane. The Germans, however, would not allow them access, even though they had placed the seven dead bodies in a row on the bank side, next to the road, where they could be viewed by everybody.

There were other German fighters airborne that night, some of them Focke-Wulf FW 190s on freeranging "Wilde Sau" ('Wild Boar') operations. And there was the murderously accurate flak. NJGs 1&2 claimed three British aircraft as destroyed over Holland between 23.18 and 23.33, as well as a 'probable' at 23.11. It is also known that three or four British aircraft were shot down by other fighters in the 65-mile stretch of the bombers' route from Deventer in central Holland and Munster in Germany. Two more bombers fell to flak guns in the same area.

Losses on the Kassel raid that night were later described as: "light." Thirty aircraft, some ten per cent of the attacking force, failed to return, taking with them some 140 aircrew members. The Wellingtons took the severest mauling that night, with 20 lost. Five Short Stirlings were lost, along with three Lancasters, one twin-engined Hampden, and a single Halifax - "P-Peter."

When aircrew were posted 'Missing', they were transferred, on paper at least, to a central holding unit, until their fate could be discovered. The unit to which the crew of 'P-Peter' was posted was No. 1 RAF Depot at Uxbridge. Percy Hopkins's odyssey had come full circle.

Percy Hopkins and the rest of the seven crew on Halifax 'P for Peter' lie in beautifully-tended graves in a corner of the main Haaksbergen Cemetery.

Rest in Peace



27 August 1942
01:49

R.A.F. Form 96
5 575 (Naval)

MESSAGE FORM SIGNALS OFFICE

Serial No. 12
Office Date Stamp
27 AUG 1942
R. A. F.
ELSHAM WOLDS

TO* No HOPKINS. RAF OFFICER'S MESS. FISHAM.

FROM* [Blank]

ORIGINATOR'S INSTRUCTIONS: * Degree of Priority: * Time of Origin: *

Signature: [Blank]

Time of Origin: [Blank]

System	Time	Reader	Sender	System	Time	Reader	Sender	System	Time	Reader	Sender
Pho	16	he	GPO								

ALL MY LOVE DEAREST
PESASUS

30 Sept 1942

POST OFFICE TELEGRAM

RECEIVED

32 2.6 PM LONDONTELEX OHMS REDTD FROM
RUISLIP '80

TO: MRS P D HOPKINS C/O COBBALD-WARREN
WEST-HOLM HILLSEA RD SWANAGE DORSET

INMEDIATE FROM AIRMINSTRY, KINGSWAY P 1143
30/9/42 DEEPLY REGRET TO ADVISE YOU THAT
ACCORDING TO INFORMATION NOW RECEIVED THROUGH THE
INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS COMMITTEE YOUR HUSBAND
HUSBAND PILOT OFFICER PERCIVAL GERALD

with this form in the envelope

POST OFFICE TELEGRAM

RECEIVED

85

FROM: HOPKINS IS BELIEVED HAVE LOST HIS LIFE AS THE RESULT
OF AIR OPERATIONS ON AUGUST 27 1942 STOP
LETTER CONFIRMING THIS TELEGRAM FOLLOWS STOP
THE AIR COUNCIL EXPRESS THEIR PROFOUND
SYMPATHY STOP UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE AIRMINSTRY
STOP = 1232 A

CT P 1143 ONE 30/9/42 27 TH 1942 1232 A ONE

Any Answer to this Letter must be Prepaid

On His Majesty's Service

Capt W. H. Hopkins.



13 Tisbury Rd.

AIR MINISTRY

If undelivered return to:-
The Officer Commanding,
ROYAL AIR FORCE,
Elsham Wolds.
(Full Postal address of unit.)

London. S.W.16.

R.A.F. Form 1477

R. A. F.

Elsham Wolds

Barnetly

Lines

Thursday.

3. 9. 42.

Dear Captain Hopkins,

I am answering your letter of the 30th August, which has just reached me concerning the sad loss in action of your brother on the night of 24th August.

Please allow me to offer you my deepest sympathy. Your brother was a very fine officer, whom I found most helpful & efficient. He was thoroughly liked by the other officers & we miss him very much. I am afraid that it is impossible for me to give you much information since he is missing with the whole of his crew & we have heard nothing from any of them, since they set out to bomb over

There were no reports of other than the usual defences & no indication as to what may have happened.

But in the past whole crews have had to bale out over Germany & have done so successfully, but in all these cases no news has been received for some considerable time. There is therefore, every reason to continue hoping that your brother may be safe & alive, though possibly a prisoner of war.

I myself sincerely hope so, & shall continue to do so, since the Captain was my personal friend & I flew on two operations with this crew, including your brother, when they were starting.

I hope that this will help you in your difficult & delicate duty, & with you, I shall continue to hope that they are all safe. Yrs sincerely
 (WING COMMANDER F.F.H. DU BOULAY) / F.F.H. Du Boulay

AIR MINISTRY
(Casualty Branch)

73-77 Oxford Street,
W.1.

Ref: -P.372793/42/P.4.Cas.B.3.

3rd August 1943.

Confirmation

03 August 1943

Madam,

I am directed to refer to a letter from this department dated 25th May, 1943, and to inform you that a report has now been received from the International Red Cross Committee, Geneva, with the information that the aircraft in which your husband, 111241 Pilot Officer P.G.Hopkins, lost his life, was shot down on 27th August 1942 over Buurse, 5 Km. east of Haaksbergen, Province of Overijssel, Holland, and was buried in the Cemetery at Haaksbergen, row 5, grave number 6.

The other six members of the crew who also lost their lives, are buried in adjoining graves.

I am, Madam,
Your obedient Servant,

for Director of Personal Services

Mrs P.G.Hopkins,
"Westholm"
Hillsea Road,
Swanage, Dorset.



Epilogue

Whilst researching the details of the last sortie of Halifax 1270 'P Peter', the family received an invitation to attend a ceremony in Haaksbergen honouring the airmen who were shot down in the area.

These are copies of the emails during the research which lead to the ceremony :

August 2013 : From Pieter Schlebaum [pieterschlebaum@gmail.com]

Dear Mr. Warren,

Thank you for getting in touch with me. I posted the message on the forum because I was looking for more information on the crashed Halifax. I am not a member of the family who look after your father's grave, but got involved in the story of Halifax W1270 accidentally actually. I am doing research after airmen from No.27 Operational Training Unit and one of them is buried at Haaksbergen. At first, I thought your father was part of this same crew and I started to look for information on P.G. Hopkins as well. Only later I found out he wasn't, but by that time the fact that P.G. Hopkins had a son who was born in the same year as he died had caught my interest. So I decided to post this message on the forum to see if I could find more information on P.G. Hopkins. So it was a huge surprise for me to find your reply.

Yours Sincerely, Pieter Schlebaum The Netherlands

15 Dec 2013 : from Ad van Zantvoort [a.zantvoort@onsneteindhoven.nl]

Dear John,

I saw your response on an entry on a website called WW2 talk.com. If you are looking for more info about the Halifax W1270 I can put you through someone who is involved Mr Han Brummelman/Haaksbergen in the research of this aircraft and he is in touch with the relatives of Pilot Frith. He is willing to exchange information with you and put you in touch with the relatives of Frith. What me concerning I am a member of the 103/576 sqdn Assn in Elsham and a few months ago I went to Lieveelde AVOGs crashmuseum and I saw a steeringwheel and bits of a gun turret which was from Halifax W1270 of 103 sqdn. Further I am in touch with the grandson of Wolfgang Thimmig and also exchange lots of information. From him I have received the so-called "abschussmeldung" for this aircraft which I am more than pleased to send to you. The report is into the German language of course but will be translated for you. As I discovered the steeringwheel of W1270 with the connection of 103 sqdn I would like to put an article in the newsletter of the Elsham Wolds Association. So anyway John feel free to send me an email and I will put you in touch with Han.

Regards and I looking forward to hear from you,

Adrian

15 Dec 2013 – from Rob Davis [rob.davis@blueyonder.co.uk]

I hope this information is useful in your research; please quote 'BOMBER COMMAND W1270' in all correspondence.

Here is the information from my database:-

SERIAL : W1270 * Please quote this in all correspondence *

DATE : 27-Aug-1942 / 28-Aug-1942

UNIT : 103 Sqdn

AIRCRAFT : Halifax II

RAF BASE : Elsham Wolds

TAKE-OFF AT : 20:54

CODES : PM:P

TARGET : Kassel

Pilot : Flight Lieutenant James Rothwell Frith RAFVR (63480) [Killed]. Son of Ernest and Charlotte Edith Frith of Tyne-mouth Northumberland..

Flight Engineer : Pilot Officer Edward Arthur Rutherford Briant RAFVR (78926) [Killed]. Son of Arthur James Briant and Alice Emmeline Briant. Husband of Dorothy June Briant of Richmond Surrey..

Navigator : Sergeant George Hunter Wilson RAFVR (1062775) [Killed]. Son of Thomas and Elizabeth Jane Wilson of South Shields Co. Durham. Husband of Doris Wilson of South Shields..

Bomb Aimer : Flight Sergeant Barriemore Smallwood Blundall RAFVR (751361) [Killed]. Son of Enock Smallwood Blundall and Jenny May Blundall of Ealing Common Middlesex..

Wireless Operator : Sergeant Walter Duncombe RAFVR (1185949) [Killed].

Mid-Upper Gunner : Sergeant John David Craig RAFVR (1051927) [Killed]. Son of Charles and Cecilia Gibson Craig of Dundee..

Rear Gunner : Pilot Officer Percival Gerald Hopkins RAFVR (111241) [Killed]. Son of William Henry and Jane Emily Hopkins. Husband of Margaret Hopkins of Christchurch Hampshire..

DETAILS : PRO 31-3-94. AIR27/814 "TO Elsham Wolds 2054." Crashed near Haaksbergen, 9¼ miles south-west of Enschede. All members of the crew are buried Haaksbergen General Cemetery. Shot down by night fighter (Hptm Wolfgang Thimmig, III/NJG1) and crashed 2354 near Buurserveen, 2½ miles S of Haaksbergen.

I salute your father and others of the crew, whose props may have stopped turning, but who are not forgotten. Your enquiry is added to my database against this aircraft loss and I will contact you if I receive further information. Please be sure to advise me, quoting W1270, if you change your email address.

Skype : rob_davis_cx500

14 Dec 2014 : From Erik Schaddelee, Schaddelee Fotografie [erik@schaddelee.com]

Hello John,

I received your e-mail address through Han Brummelman. I understand from him the two of you are still in touch.

The past year I helped Han to finish his book about Haaksbergen during WW2 and the plane crashes.

Now the next step is envolving. We are trying to raise money to put up a monument for the fallen airmen who died around Haaksbergen.

We are planning to reveal that in April 2015, but as you can imagine it is a lot of work to raise the money. So it still is work in progress.

With all the stress writing and editing the book I had no time to mail you properly to ask you for more information about you and your dad. So I hope you don't mind that I still am on the hunt for information.

In my humble opinion I think it is very important to keep telling the stories off all those men who gave their lives for our freedom. Your dad is one of them, and it would be an honour to me to complete his story, so that people never will forget.

01 Jan 2015 from John to erik Schaddelee :

Hi Erik• - The attached is part 1 of a 2-part 'history' of my father's time in the RAF, compiled by an ex-RAF•friend of mine for my 60th birthday.

It was too big to send all at once, so I broke it down to two parts. •I will follow up with the second part, and again with a picture of my father holding my sister. •He was killed the night I was born, So he never got to see me . . .

Let me know if this is useful for you . . .

My sister and I plan to come over to Holland this year, to visit my father's grave. •It would be good to meet up, so I will let you know when we have set a date.

Kind regards

John Warren

06/02/2015 – from Harold Pot

Dear Mr. John Warren,

In our documents i found out that You are the son of Percival Gerald Hopkins, killed on the 28th August 1942 near Haaksbergen, Netherlands.

I like to inform You that we will have a ceremony on 4th of April 2015 for 23 fallen British, Canadian and American Allies who died near Haaksbergen during World war II.

During this ceremony we will reveal a monument with all 23 names on it. The ceremony will be situated in the center of Haaksbergen and will take about an hour or a little longer.

Some days after the ceremony we will replace the monument near the graves at the Haaksbergen General Cemetery.

Regards,

Harold Pot

Comité Monument Fallen Allies Haaksbergen.

We would be very pleased if you and your family would attend the ceremony.

Our Comité is very busy with the organisation, we invited representatives of the British, Canadian and American embassy.

During the ceremony there will also be the Band of Liberation <http://www.bandofliberation.nl/> and the Colour Party of the Royal Canadian Legion <http://www.rcl005.nl/nl/colour-party/>

We also trying to get some old WW2 vehicles. The ceremony will start at 14:00 hrs in the center of Haaksbergen.

Harold

an: brummelman [mailto:hanbrummelman@hetnet.nl]

Verzonden: woensdag 11 februari 2015 11:56

Aan: 'john@mytravelclub.co.uk'

Onderwerp:

Dear John,

Herewith I sent to you a map which is a part of my book "Under the flightpath"

The location of the crash from the Halifax is marked with a green dot number 1.

I am looking forward to meet you soon,

Han J.Brummelman.

Phone +31 53 4766631 or •gsm:•+31653464931.

Email: hanbrummelman@hetnet.nl

Hello John,

I have complete the reservation by Erve Bruggert and I have seen your accommodation there.

It seems a good place for your family. As already mentioned we pay the accommodation for the period of 3 april till 6 april.

If you like you can have breakfast in the hotel, price is € 8 p/p. Or prepare it by yourself in the kitchen.

If you have further questions of need my support, don't hesitate to contact me again.

I am looking forward to meet your family in Haaksbergen.

Han

Hello Han

In going through a box of my mother's documents, I have found one letter that came from the family that got in touch with my mother shortly after my father was shot down. They tended my father's grave for a long time, and my mother was so grateful . . .

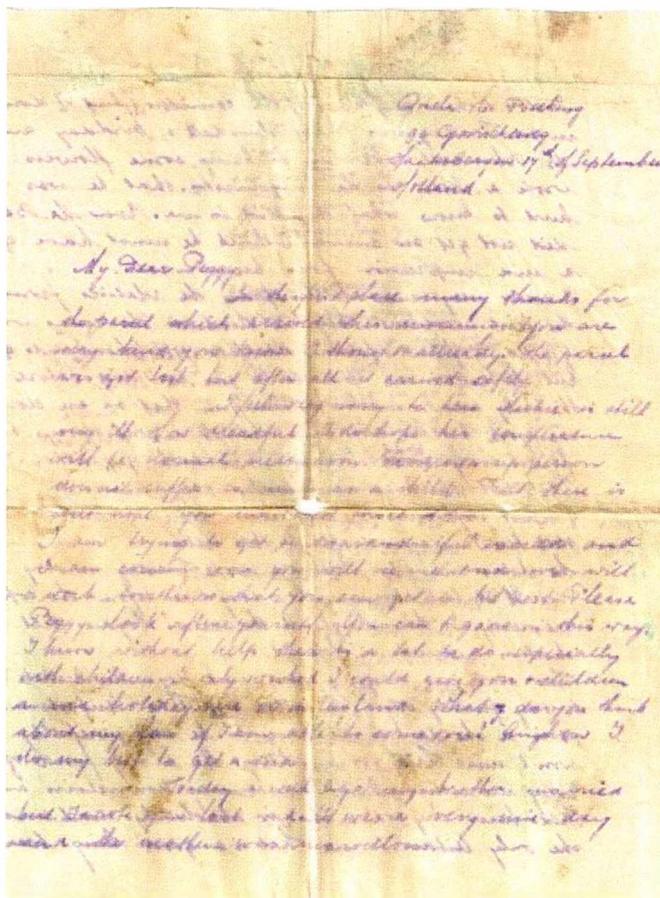
Unfortunately, the ink has faded – and seeped into the paper, so I cannot quite make out the name and address . . .

I believe the lady's name was Gisela, but I cannot make out the rest . . .

Is it possible that you could recognise the name – or the address?• I would love to meet up with any of the family that might still be in the area . . .

I attach a scan of the part of the letter that contains the name and address.

(We did not manage to trace her . . .)



The Remembrance Ceremony in Haaksbergen On April 4th 2015

06 February 2015 - from Harold Pot :

I like to inform You that we will have a ceremony on 4th of April 2015 for 23 fallen British, Canadian and American Allies who died near Haaksbergen during World war II.
During this ceremony we will reveal a monument with all 23 names on it. The ceremony will be situated in the center of Haaksbergen and will take about an hour or a little longer.
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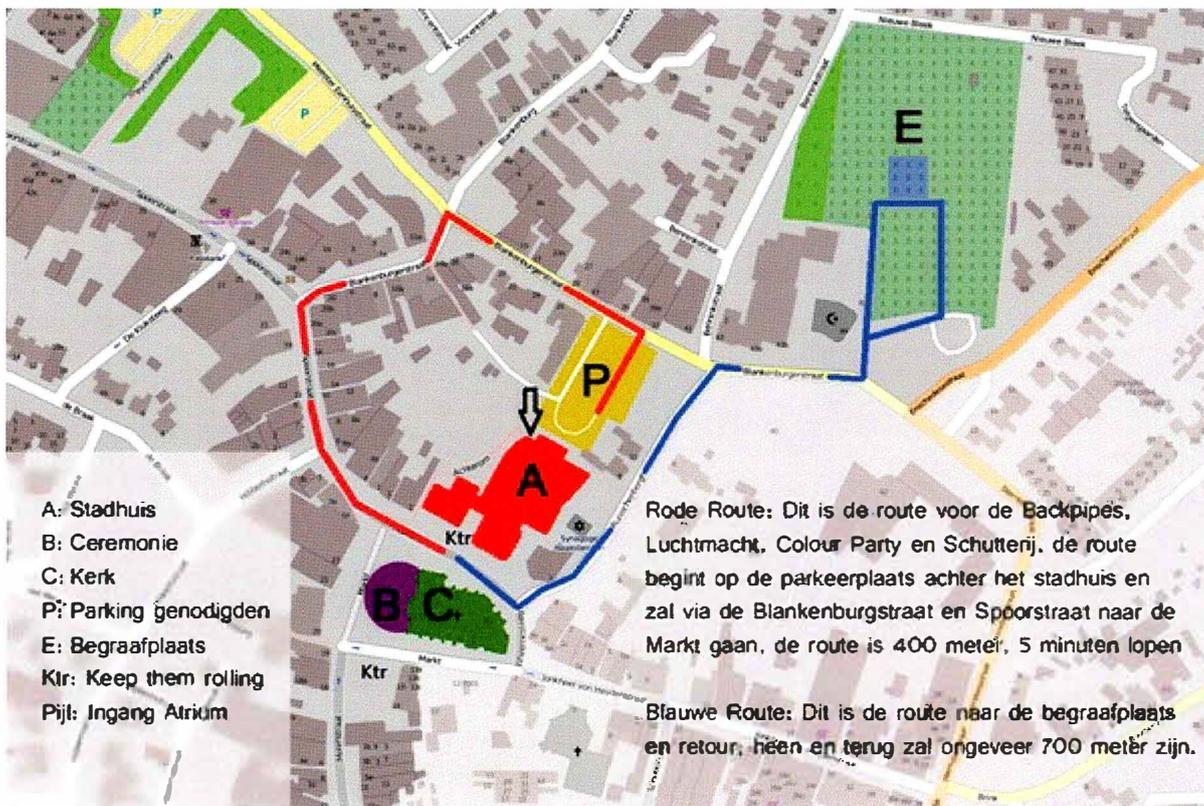
During the ceremony there will also be the Band of Liberation <http://www.bandofliberation.nl/> and the Colour Party of the Royal Canadian Legion <http://www.rc1005.nl/nl/colour-party/>

We also trying to get some old WW2 vehicles. The ceremony will start at 14:00 hrs in the center of Haaksbergen.

Regards,

Harold Pot

Comité Monument Fallen Allies Haaksbergen.



Dear John,

On the 4th of April we have a parking place near the ceremony. The entrance is opposite the Blankenburgstraat 39, Haaksbergen.
The reception room is in the city hall (glass section), there is also an exposition about the war in Haaksbergen.

Hope to meet You there about 1:00 PM

Harold





Invitees reveal monument
fallen allies 1945 - 2015

Honorable guests,

We invite you to the official reception on the 4th of April at 13:00 hrs by the town council and the committee in the atrium of our congregation.
You can use the car park at the Blankenburgstraat at height of number 39.

The program is as follows,

- 13:00 hrs. Walk-in and reception in the atrium.
- 13:45 hrs. Attendees go to the market where the ceremony is held.
- 14:00 hrs. Beginning ceremony.
- 15:30 hrs. End of the ceremony, opportunity to visit the graves of fallen allies.
- 16:00 hrs. Closing with a drink in the atrium.
- 18:00 hrs. Dinner with the Committee and our English guests at Restaurant "Bij Boenders", Beckumerkerkweg 20, Beckum.

We hope to welcome you on the 4th April.

Sincerely Yours,
On behalf of the committee Monument Fallen Allies Haaksbergen.

J.C. Gerritsen, Mayor of Haaksbergen
J.J.Brummelman, Chairman committee Monument Fallen Allies Haaksbergen.





Before the ceremony started, there was a reception in the Atrium.

There were displays of memorabilia from the airmen on the monument - including the steering wheel and pedals from Halifax 1270 - 'P - Peter'



Large crowd of invited guests



Farewell dinner at the Restaurant Bij Boenders



< Grandson Russell and ^ Great Grandsons Daniel and James

l to r : John, Peter and Mickey plus Daniel

l to r : Scott, Peter, John and Mickey

Five generations of Hoppy's family were at the ceremony :

Nephew Peter - he was the pageboy at the wedding of Hoppy and Peggy; Daughter Mickey; Son John (with wife PJ); Grandsons Russell (with wife Liesl) and Scott; and Great Grandsons James and Daniel.

Peter was ten at the time when the news of his uncle's death arrived by telegram - and remembers the day clearly . . .





Over a thousand people came to the ceremony for unveiling the monument for the airmen who died when their aircraft were brought down in the area around Haaksbergen



Military bands provided a moving background

There were representatives from British, Canadian and American Embassies, as well as the Allies Armed Forces



I was pleased to be able to thank the people of Haaksbergen for taking care of our men's graves



Wreaths from each of the countries and Forces were laid by the monument



It was a very moving and well organised ceremony, much appreciated by all.



Never to be forgotten . . . by the Dutch . . . and by ourselves



The good people of Haaksbergen made a special area of the main cemetery as a memorial place for the Allied airmen who lost their lives in the war. It is beautifully kept, and the monument has been placed next to the area.



"OPDAT WIJ NIET VERGETEN"

Barriemore	Blundall	RAFVR	22	jr
Edward	Briant	RAFVR	33	jr
John	Craig	RAFVR	23	jr
Walter	Duncombe	RAFVR	28	jr
James	Frith	RAFVR	21	jr
Percival	Hopkins	RAFVR	28	jr
George	Wilson	RAFVR	32	jr
David	Richards	RAFVR	23	jr
Rupert	Sawyer	RAFVR	22	jr
Frederick	Alloway	RAFVR	21	jr
Edward	Morris	RAFVR	23	jr
Joseph	Stewart	RCAF	23	jr
Harold	Thompson	RAFVR	29	jr
Ronald	Williamson	RAFVR	29	jr
William	Dunkerley	RAFVR	21	jr
Sydney	Jepson	RAFVR	20	jr
Kenneth	Masterson	RCAF	20	jr
Levie	Rivest	RCAF	24	jr
Leslie	Sutherland	RCAF	24	jr
Lester	Look Jr.	USAAF	23	jr
Boy	Rightmire Jr.	USAAF	24	jr
erome	Schneider	USAAF	1	jr
ward	George	Welsh guards	?	jr

1939 - 1945

The monument >



Carefully tended graves



Three generations pay tribute :

Son, Grandson and Great Grandson



Hoppy's Grave

A beautiful final resting place



A few days after the ceremony the monument was moved from the town square to its permanent position, right by the graves of the 23 airmen listed on the monument

Viewing the crash site

Mk II Halifax 1270, P - Peter crashed into the Buurser peat moor, 4 kilometres to the South of Haaksbergen.

All that is left of the crash site is the hole left by the crashing plane



In 1942, there were few trees in this area, just a peat bog, so the aircraft did not explode when it crashed, which enabled the bodies to be brought out . . .

. . . and laid out on the track alongside by the German soldiers who came to guard the crashed bomber.



Postscript - Reunion at Elsham Wolds

While researching, we discovered that there is an Annual Reunion in the village of Elsham of the RAF Elsham Wolds Association, and the next one was going to be on 30 August - just a few days after the 73rd anniversary of the crash of P for Peter . . .

So we joined the Association, and mentioned it to Han Brummelman who said he would like to come along, and show the video of the Ceremony.

Communication with the Association :

01 July - to Jennie Mackay, Secretary of the Association :

Dear Jenny

Firstly, I am sending off the application form for membership of the RAF EWA.

I will also be sending the booking forms for the reunion.

Let me give you some background to the request that follows ;

My father was P.G. Hopkins. • He was the Rear Gunner in Halifax P Peter –W1270 that was shot down near Haaksbergen in Holland, on the night of 27/28 August 1942 (the night I was born).

He, and the six other crew members, was buried in the Haaksbergen cemetery by the Dutch, and his grave was well looked after by them.

His aircraft was the first to be shot down in that area, as he was in the first wave of the new assault on Germany with massed bombers from the Midlands/NE England area.

In February this year, I received an invitation to attend a ceremony in Haaksbergen that was to commemorate the 23 British, Canadian and American airmen who died near there during the war. It was a major ceremony, celebrating 70 years of freedom, thanks to the allies.

During the ceremony a monument was unveiled with all 23 names on it. It was a very well-organised event, with military bands, representatives from the Embassies of the countries involved and members of various armed forces.

The Chairman of the Committee that organised the ceremony was Han Brummelman – who also was present as a small child at the scene of the crashed Halifax, and has vivid memories of it. • He took us to the crash site the following day.

Out of all the relatives that attended the ceremony, I was the only direct descendent, and so was something of a 'special guest', and made a speech thanking the people for looking after the graves of the airmen.

Han is writing another book, about the air operations of that time, and is coming over to England to visit some of the airfields that were involved. One of which is, of course Elsham Wolds.

In view of the ceremony which commemorated the airmen from Elsham Wolds, I would like to invite him to the Reunion as a 'special guest'.

He can bring a film of the ceremony, which could possibly be shown at some point to those interested.

I will of course pay for his meals, but I wondered if I could extend an official invitation to this man, with his connection to the airmen of Elsham Wolds.

Han Brummelman was a 1st Lieut. in the Dutch Air Force.

He has written a book 'Under the Flightpath', which is about the period that this was commemorating.

I attach a map that shows the aircraft crashes around Haaksbergen, and my father's Halifax is marked with a green dot number 1.

Response from the Secretary :

Hi

I will consult the Committee. We do have other nationals who look after overseas graves. It has not been usual practice to offer special invitations but everyone is made very welcome. We don't have any equipment to show films and not sure where would fit in to programme. Will discuss with Committee. We do not issue a formal seating plan but will try to arrange for you and guest to sit with President and Vice Chair of Association. Does gentleman concerned have email/ postal address to which invite could be sent?

Rdgs

Jennie MacKay

To Han Brummelman :

Han – you are going to get an official invite from the Committee. •You will be asked to give a speech of about 5 minutes, at the AGM. •(they say most of those who attend the AGM are hard of hearing, and have short attention spans !)

Han - ¶ attach the menus for the buffet lunch and the Dinner. Would you please make your choices and let me know. Cheers

Hello John,

Thank you very much for the efforts you have put in organisation ¶my visit to the reunion of the 103 sqn.

With pleasure I will follow your proposal with I have notes as follow:

Friday 28 august i fly from Ams to Norwich, before I take to train to Amsterdam and will be on time in Ams.airport , I have to find out which one of the two mentioned flights .

It is delighted to meet your sister as well and to stay dear.

Also the booking in the Coach House seems very nice.

Separate I have send to you my choices for the buffet and diner.

Thank you very much again ¶so far.

Han

From the Secretary : From : j.p.mackay@btinternet.com

Date : 11/08/2015 - 14:40 (GMTDT)

To : hanbrummelman@hetnet.nl

Cc : john@thetravelclub.co.uk, paullatham06@aol.com, robert.whymark@btinternet.com

Subject : Guest of President of the RAF Elsham Wolds Association's Annual Reunion

Dear Mr Brummelman,

Please allow me to introduce myself - I am the General Secretary of the above named Association. The Association is made up of those who flew with 103 and 576 Squadrons, all who served at RAF Elsham Wolds as part of Bomber Command in the Second World War, and the relatives of those who served. Our President Mr Gordon Mellor, our current Chairman Mr Ken Duddell (who unfortunately will be unable to attend as he is in poor health); and our current Vice-Chairman Mr Robert Whymark have asked me to extend an invitation to you to join us at our annual reunion in the village of Elsham in North Lincolnshire on Saturday the 29th August and Sunday the 30th of August 2015.

We are opening the Village Hall on the Saturday afternoon for an informal gathering. The dinner will be held on Saturday evening at Elsham Golf Club. On the Sunday morning we hold our Annual General Meeting and we would be delighted if you could make a short address to our members. The meeting is followed by a buffet lunch and a Memorial Service.

Your friend John Warren has the full details of the reunion programme and I am sure he will be able to discuss all relevant details. We will all be delighted if you delighted if your are able to attend.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Warmest regards, Jennie MacKay

Notice of the AGM :**RAF Elsham Wolds Association – Notice of forthcoming AGM August 29th 2015.****Venue: Elsham Village Hall, Chapel Street, Elsham, North Lincolnshire.****Start: 10.30am****Finish: 12.00 (noon).**

The AGM will take place on Sunday, Aug 29th 2015. Members are invited to submit items for the Agenda by no later than August 18th, 2015. Please note this is also the **FINAL** date for requesting and paying for tickets for this year's Reunion.

**RAF ELSHAM WOLDS ASSOCIATION REUNION PROGRAMME – 2015 – Aug 29th & 30th.
ADVANCED BOOKINGS EXCEPT FOR AFTERNOON OF 29/8/15.**

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	TIME	COST PER PERSON
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Sat Aug 29 th 2015	Afternoon	Elsham Village Hall		
	opens 2.00pm			

Tea/coffee & biscuits available for purchase

2.00pm, close 4.00pm

Evening – **Reunion Dinner**

Reunion Dinner – Golf Club, Elsham, DN20 0LS 6.30pm, **7.00pm**, 10.30/11.00pm **£25.00.**

Advanced bookings ONLY – members and guests ONLY. Bookings close 18/8/15.

Sun Aug 30th 2015

Annual General Meeting **Elsham Village Hall**, Elsham, DN20 0RN 10.30am – 12.00 (noon)

Buffet Lunch **Elsham Village Hall – advanced tickets only.** 12.15pm – 1.30pm **£14.00.**

Advanced bookings ONLY – members and guests ONLY. Bookings close 18/8/15.

Memorial Service & Flypast **Service will be led by Cannon P Hall at Anglia Water Treatment Plant, Middlegate Lane, Elsham. Wreath-laying will follow the Service. TO BE ADVISED FLYPAST – TIME TO BE ADVISED**, weather permitting & aircraft serviceability.

Sunday Supper **Elsham Village Hall**, DN20 0RN 6.30pm, **7.00pm**, close 10.00pm **£18.00.**

Advanced bookings ONLY – members and guests ONLY. Bookings close 18/8/15.

NB – timing of Memorial Service and Flypast on 30/8/15 will be notified to members once we have been notified by BBMF of the estimated time of the Flypast. Please look out for further information in the next issue of the Newsletter. If you have an email address – that you have notified to the Association Secretary – please monitor your emails.

My sister and I drove with Han up to Elsham on the Friday, and stayed in the Exchange Coach House Inn. On Saturday we went to the Reunion. Dinner very good, speeches interesting, and Han's presentation was very well received.

Stayed for the AGM and Buffet Lunch then drove back to Overstrand. Han flew back to Amsterdam a few days later.

All in all, a very good final signing off on the story.

We can now ourselves rest in peace . . .



Royal Air Force Elsham Wolds Association

President - Gordon Mellor.
Chairman - Ken Duddell.



Membership Form - New or Renewal

Membership is open to :-

1/ All who served at Elsham Wolds and 13 Base.

2/ All who served with 103 Squadron, 576 Squadron or the Squadrons of 13 Base at any time in their history.

3/ Next of kin, family or friends of any personnel who served at Elsham Wolds or 13 Base and/or with 103 Squadron, 576 Squadron or the Squadrons of 13 Base.

4/ Any other person who has a particular and specific interest in RAF Elsham Wolds, 13 Base, 103 Squadron, 576 Squadron and/or the Squadrons of 13 Base.

Members can attend the Reunion Dinner and any other functions or events organised by the Association.

Annual Membership Fee is now £15 per annum. The membership year runs from the 1st September annually.

Please supply the following details in block capitals.

Name (Including any decorations)	
Address	
Telephone number	
E Mail address (if applicable)	
If new Member :- Link or interest to Elsham Wolds/13 Base and the Squadrons. If veteran, dates of service with above and duties.	

UK cheques in £ Sterling payable to the RAF Elsham Wolds Association. Any further donations will be most welcome. Overseas payments must be made by sending local currency in the post or alternatively an international money order in £ Sterling.

If you know of anybody who would like to join, or has not received a mailing, please photocopy this form and pass it on to them or let us know and we will send one to them.

Return completed form and payment to :-

J. P. MacKay, 18 Carr Lane, Escrick, Nr York, North Yorkshire, YO19 6JQ.

Tel No: 01904 728566.

E Mail: j.p.mackay@btopenworld.com

Haaksberger Koerier

Weekkrant

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weekkrant.nl/webwinkel

Woensdag 8 april 2015

www.haaksbergerkoerier.nl



KINDEREN WEERBAARDER

Wienk & Janssen: 'Een kind leert pas goed als die lekker in zijn vel zit'

» 2



NA OPLEVERING NIEUWE MST

Haaksbergenaar Niels Slotman bouwt met collega's ziekenhuis in Mozambique

» 5



KLIK & WIN ACTIE

Win een goed gevuld Cartoon Networkpakket

Ga snel naar:
deweekkrant.nl/actie

Oude stuw Haaksbergen stamt uit 19e eeuw

Pareltje onder water

De resten van een waterwerk die Waterschap Rijn en IJssel onlangs tijdens werkzaamheden in de Buurserbeek in Haaksbergen blootlegde, blijken te stammen van een oude stuw die in 1884 werd gebouwd en in 1913 is afgebroken. Dit kwam naar voren uit nader archeologisch onderzoek.

HAAKSBERGEN - In archieven is ook nog de oude bestektekening van de voormalige stuw teruggevonden. De afmetingen van de resten komen daarmee overeen. Het aantreffen van ronde draadnagels in en een bepaalde cementsoort staven daaronder dat het om een 19e eeuwse waterwerk gaat. Vo-

met de gemeente en de landeigenaar bekijken wat er met de gevonden resten van de oude stuw, bestaande uit vurenhouten halkan, gaat gebeuren.

In de Buurserbeek op Landgoed Het Lankheut wordt een 'bevaarbare' vispassage aangelegd zodat vissen vanaf de IJssel de Buurserbeek kunnen opzwellen naar geschikte paaigronden.

VISSEN KUNNEN STRAKS ZWEMMEN NAAR GESCHIKTE PAAIGRONDEN

tige week werd ook nog de mogelijkheid open gehouden dat de vondst uit de 17e zou kunnen stammen, maar dat blijkt dus niet zo te zijn. De oude stuw blijkt in 1884 voor 2400 gulden te zijn aangelegd. Waterschap Rijn en IJssel gaat nu in overleg

met de gemeente en de landeigenaar bekijken wat er met de gevonden resten van de oude stuw, bestaande uit vurenhouten halkan, gaat gebeuren. In de Buurserbeek op Landgoed Het Lankheut wordt een 'bevaarbare' vispassage aangelegd zodat vissen vanaf de IJssel de Buurserbeek kunnen opzwellen naar geschikte paaigronden. Momenteel vormen de Oostendorpervaterrmolens en enkele stuwen daarvoor een belemmering. Het huidige tracé van de Buurserbeek blijft behouden en fungeert straks als hoogwatergeul zodat in tijden met veel noerslag overtollige water snel weg kan. Op Landgoed het Lankheut wordt een waterbergingsgebied aangelegd dat wordt ingezet om water tijdelijk te parkeren.

Expositie en film Sumchog

HAAKSBERGEN - Sumchog Kersbergen opent zondag 12 april om 14.30 uur in Kunstzaal Achterom in Haaksbergen haar tentoonstelling 'Himalaya Mix Media Artist'. Daarna treedt ze samen met haar broer Pema op. Zij zingen Tibetaanse en Nepalese liederen. Beiden zijn bekend

van de documentaire 'The only son', die op zondag 17 mei en donderdag 21 mei te zien is in het filmhuis van Theater De Kappen aan de Sterrebosstraat. De expositie van Sumchog Kersbergen is te bezichtigen van 12 april tot en met 31 mei. Lees verder op pagina 8.

Bekersprookje tweede elftal HSC'21 gaat verder

HAAKSBERGEN - Het bekersprookje van het tweede elftal van HSC '21 blijft maar doorgaan. Paszaterdag werd tweedeklasser WVV uit Wageningen op het Scholtenhagen met 2-0 verslagen, waardoor het team van Martijn van der Lee voor de eerste keer ooit is doorgedrongen tot de halve finale. Een prestatie die normaal gesproken goed zou zijn voor plaatsing voor de 'grote' KNVB beker, maar hiervoor komen alleen stan-

daardteams in aanmerking. De prestatie is nog meer bijzonder aangezien het tweede elftal een herenop moest doen op spelers uit de A1. Tom Veldhuis, Garben ten Hag en Dion Hartgerink speelden zelfs in de basis en deden dat uitstekend. In de slotfase viel Brent Schulte nog in. In de halve finale wacht de winnaar van HHC Hardenberg - Excelsior '31 (14 april) Wanneer de halve finale plaatsvindt is, nog niet bekend.



Eerbetoon aan helden

Percival Hopkins was one of the allied pilots who died in the war in Haaksbergen. He was only 28. The Hopkins family (see photo) attended the unveiling of the monument to the allied fliers on the market on Saturday, seventy years after the war. Percival's name is on the monument, as well as those of 22 other airmen who died. During the war, several of the planes

crashed into the municipality of Haaksbergen. The 23 killed pilots were buried at the cemetery at Enschedesestraat. Because there is no little room for the ceremony there, this took place at the Pancratius church. After the unveiling, The Last Post sounded.

Talenten bij toernooi Twente

HAAKSBERGEN - De Voetbalacademie FC Twente '65 houdt zondag 12 april een (7 X 7) toernooi op het complex van v.v. Haaksbergen. Van 1000 tot 11.15 uur worden diverse wedstrijden gespeeld door de geselecteerde spelers. Uit deze groep jonge talentvolle spelers zal uiteindelijk de selectie worden bekend gemaakt voor het komende seizoen. In de voorselectie van de regio Enschede/Haaksbergen zitten drie spelers uit Haaksbergen. Rutger Schatthornborg en Niek Veldhuis van Bon Boys en Sjoerd Bouwhuis van HSC '21.

Wijkavond over welzijn

HAAKSBERGEN - De Wijkraad Centrum Zuid-West houdt donderdag 16 april een wijkavond. De vorige in oktober ging niet door in verband met het drama met de monstertruck. Het College van B & W is aanwezig, evenals de wijkagent en de wijkbeheerder. Samen met hen wordt in gesprek gegaan over de wijk en de toekomst. Voor de pauze gaat het vooral over de activiteiten van de Wijkraad en de inrichting van de wijk. Het tweede gedeelte van de avond gaat over zorg en welzijn. Sinds 1 januari jl. is het nodige veranderd. Hier-

bij speelt de gemeente een belangrijke rol. In de wijk wonen relatief veel ouderen. De veranderingen in Zorg en Welzijn kunnen ook gevolgen hebben voor familieleden en bureaus. Ook wordt specifiek ingegaan op het onderwerp 'participeren' en de wijze waarop wijkbewoners hier een bijdrage aan kunnen leveren. Een toelichting hierop wordt gegeven door het preventie team van de Noaberpoort, Milou Aarninkhof (regisseur) en Manon van der Laest (clientondersteuner). Bezoekers krijgen gelegenheid om vragen te stellen.

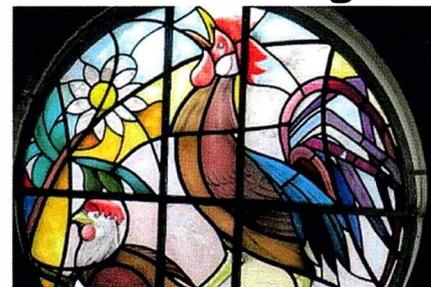
Betekenis vrijheid in 38 gedichten

HAAKSBERGEN - De gemeente heeft tot nu toe 38 gedichten ontvangen na de oproep aan bewoners om in dichtvorm weer te geven wat vrijheid voor hen betekent. De gedichten worden nu beoordeeld. Vervolgens worden ze door de gemeente samen met de Stichting Centrum Management (SMC) en de Haaksbergse Ondernemers Vereniging (HOV) heren en der in het dorp gepresenteerd. De mooiste gedichten worden voorgedragen tijdens de festiviteiten op Bevrijdingsdag 5 mei.

Lezing over wederopbouw Haaksbergen

HAAKSBERGEN - De Historische Kring en de Kunstkring Haaksbergen besteden dinsdag 14 april vanaf 19.30 uur aandacht aan de interessante periode na de bevrijding. Een actueel onderwerp nu zeventig jaar bevrijding zo massaal gevierd wordt. Het is verrassend hoe het beeld van het dorp in deze periode veranderd is. De periode 1945-1960 was de tijd, dat de mouwen opgestroopt werden om het land te herstellen van de gigantische oorlogsschade. Ook Haaksbergen veran-

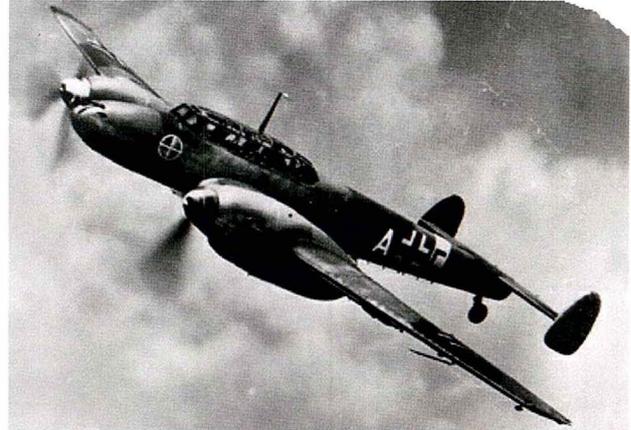
derde in deze korte periode door veel nieuwbouw en ingroepen in de ruimtelijke structuur. Een kenmerkend gebouw uit deze periode is de landbouwhuishoudschool aan de Enschedesestraat gebouwd door de hertekende Brabantse architect Jos Bedaux (1910-1989). De twee zonen van Bedaux, Frans en George, komen naar Haaksbergen om het verhaal van de architectuur van hun vader te vertellen. De lezing wordt gehouden in het Bakkershuis aan de Molenst raat 73.



Ook het beeld van Haaksbergen veranderde na de oorlog onder meer door veel nieuwbouw.



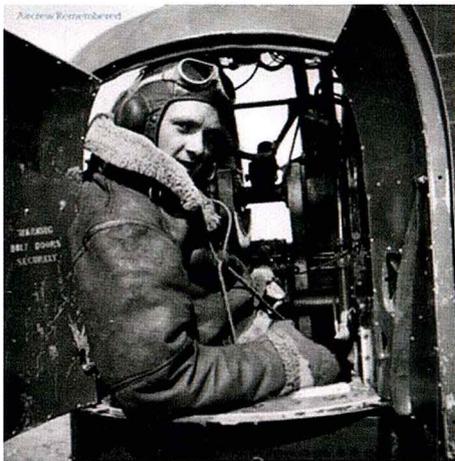
Handley Page Halifax Mk II



German night fighter Bf 110 F4



Wellington 1c



A gunner sits in the confines of the rear turret of a Wellington bomber. No mean feat for the 6ft. 4ins. 13 stone Flight Sergeant Gordon Wagner. *Courtesy AWM*



Imperial War Museum

CH 11320

