



2020

Halifax HR819



Joop Hendrix

(Editing Sarah Rombouts)

Plane Hunters

Recovery Team

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Introduction

In the spring of 2019, Planehunter members Joop Hendrix and Sjaak de Veth, investigated a known Lancaster crash site. The crash site was on a former Luftwaffe airfield from WWII, in the vicinity of Venlo, close to the German border. This research was done with the cousins Peter and Peter Grubben. The cousins told they had located an “unknown crashsite” a few years ago in the nearby German town of Leuth. Just outside of Leuth aircraft parts were found on a ploughed field. Intrigued by their finds, Planehunters started an investigating with the Cousins Grubben.

Archeological research

With permission of the landowner, a site visit was conducted several times by the team. Remenants of the crashed aircraft were located on a small patch of land, and it was determined as being from an allied bomber. The remenants were:



a switch mounted in the cockpit or on the flight engineers panel.



Part of a navigation plotter Air Ministry reference number 6B 232



Example picture



Part of a bomb selector switch box



one Florin (2 schillings) 1931

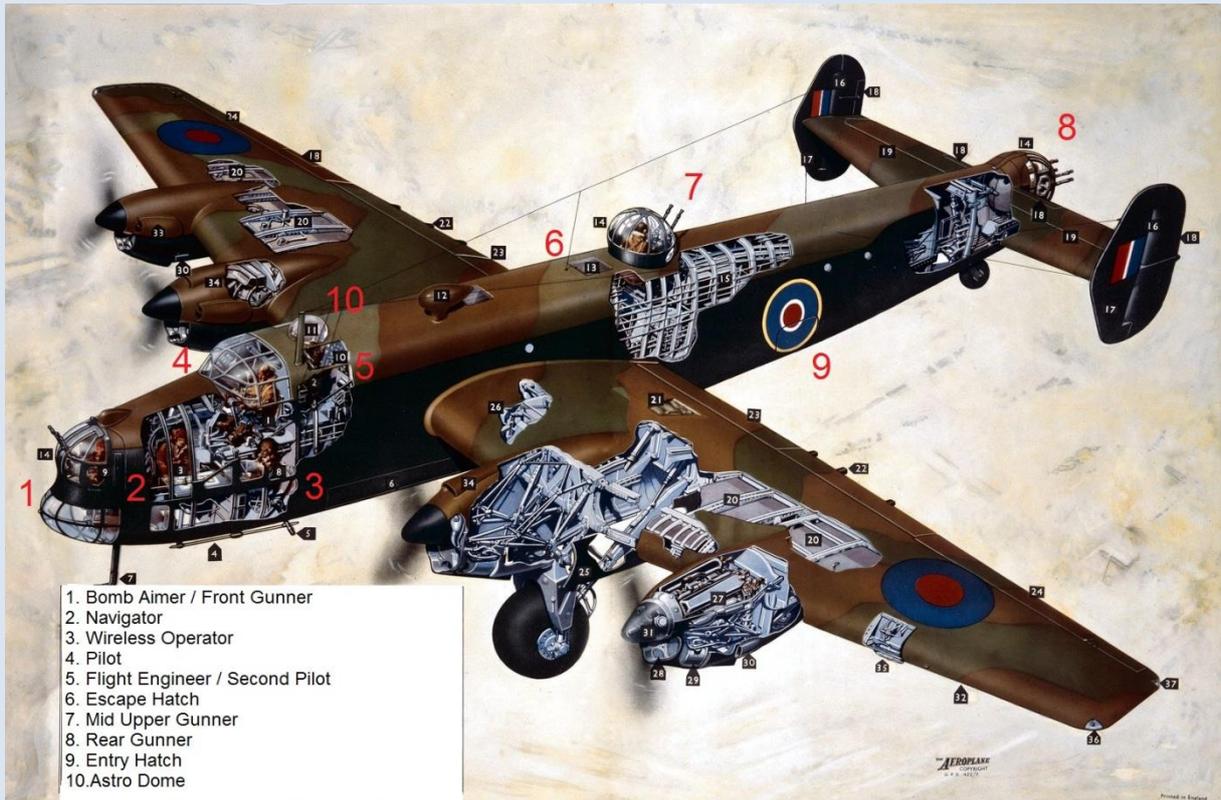


The parachute buckle is a find that suggests a crewmember was killed in the crash. The parachute had not been used.

Most found parts were no deeper than 6 inches under the surface of the ploughed field. The buckle was laying on top of the soil!



Finally, an aircraft identifier was found on one of the parts, the code 57 and 59 proved it to be from a Handley Page "Halifax" MkII bomber.



Another rather distinctive find was the cap badge from the Royal New Zealand Air Force.



Find

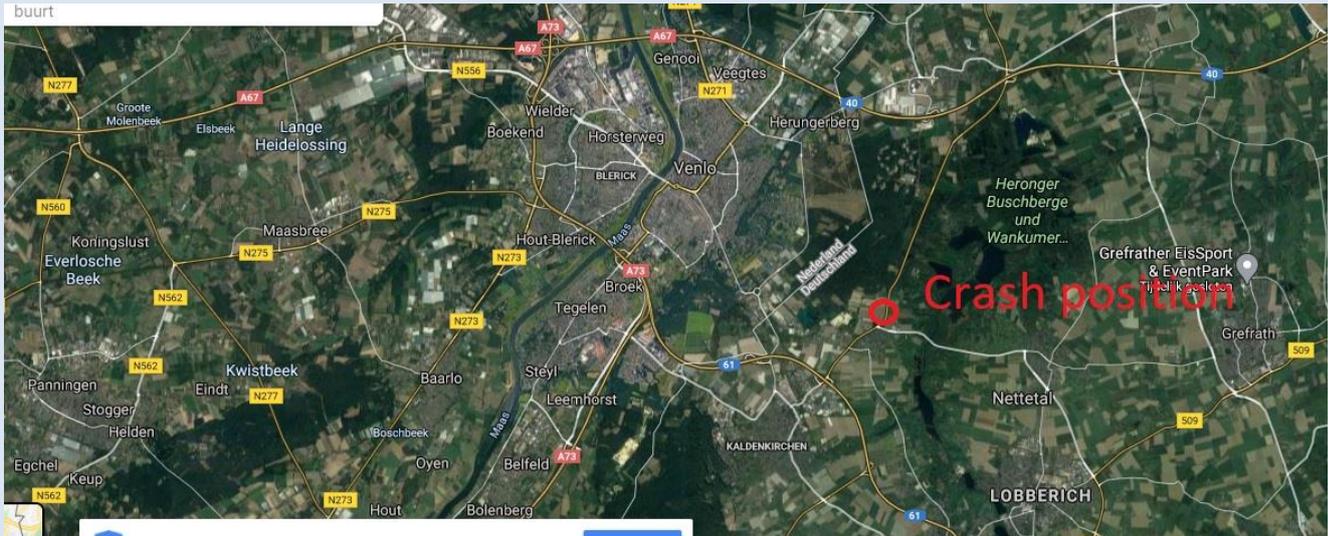


example



The shown parts are the most important finds, other than a part from an oxygen connector, lots of perspex from the cockpit windows, aluminium parts from fuselage and wings and a few seat buckles.

Crash location.



The location of the crash in relation to the town of Venlo and the German border.



The google location of the field were the parts were found



crash site

The finds were in a relative small part of the field which suggests a rather vertical impact. Investigation with deep seeking detectors was negative so there are no larger parts hidden beneath the impact zone.

History of the crash

Marcel Hogenhuis a local researcher and friend was contacted. He knew the crash site and had a wealth of information about the crash.

Halifax MkII HR819 (TL-K) was one of eighteen No.35 Squadron aircraft detailed to attack Aachen on the night of the 13th /14th July 1943. The aircraft was shot down by Hans Dieter Frank with his Me-110 at 14,500 feet.

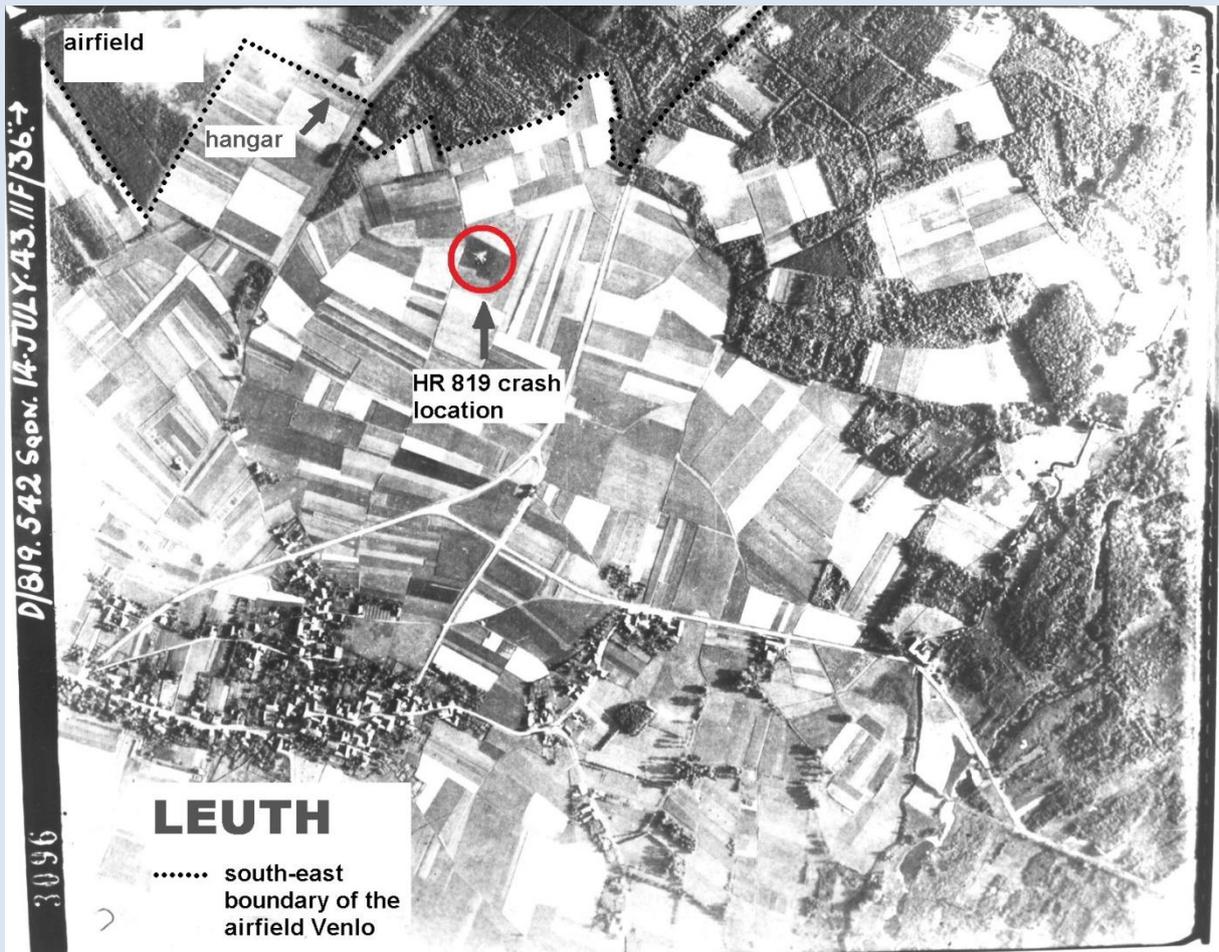
- EW Saywell (Pilot)
- FW Whittaker (Navigator)
- ER Moore (Air Bomber)
- RW Wisson (Wireless Operator)
- SF Hughes (Air Gunner)
- FF Ward (Air Gunner)
- J Marsh (Flight Engineer)

HR819 failed to return and the squadron's Operations Record Book shows "This aircraft is missing, nothing being heard from it after taking off"

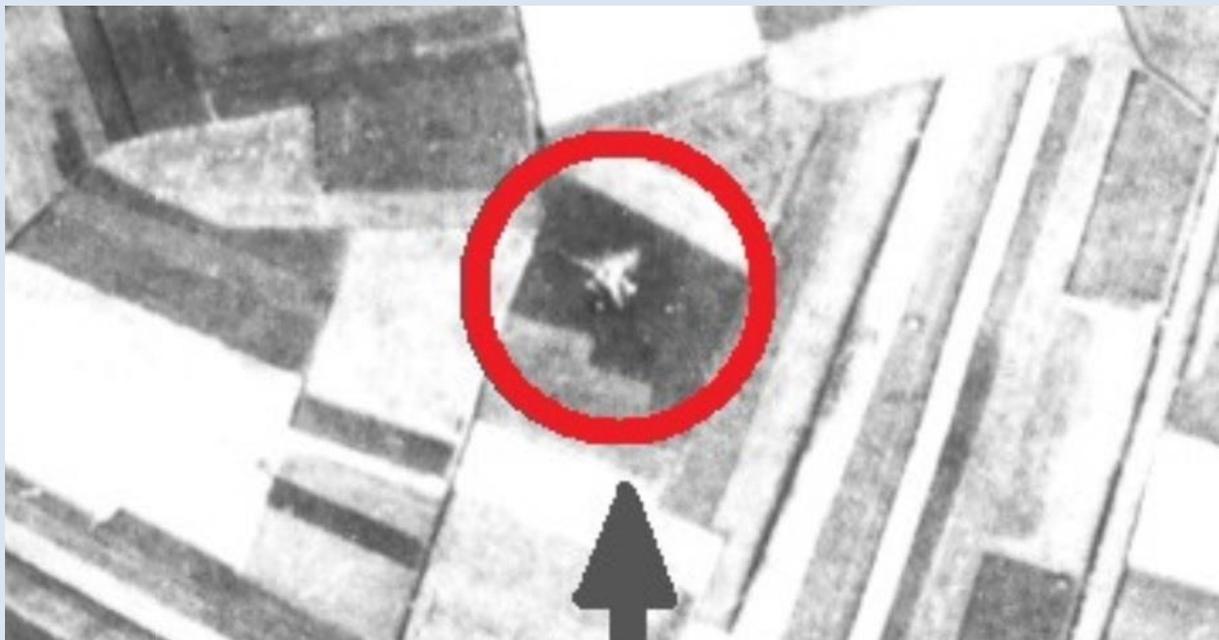


102 ceylon Squadron website picture from the crew HR819.

Only the wireless operator Ronald Wisson survived the crash. The other 6 members are still missing.



Aerial picture from 14 July 1943 Halifax HR819 visible.(Marcel Hogenhuis)



From the picture a few important conclusions were drawn, firstly, the crash position confirmed the field were the parts were found. Secondly, the aircraft appeared to be broken up in fairly big pieces.

If you correlate these findings to that the remains were found in a relatively small area, the conclusion would be that the aircraft hit the ground in a stalled condition with almost no forward speed. A spinned aircraft that comes down like a corkscrew would give that effect.

Family

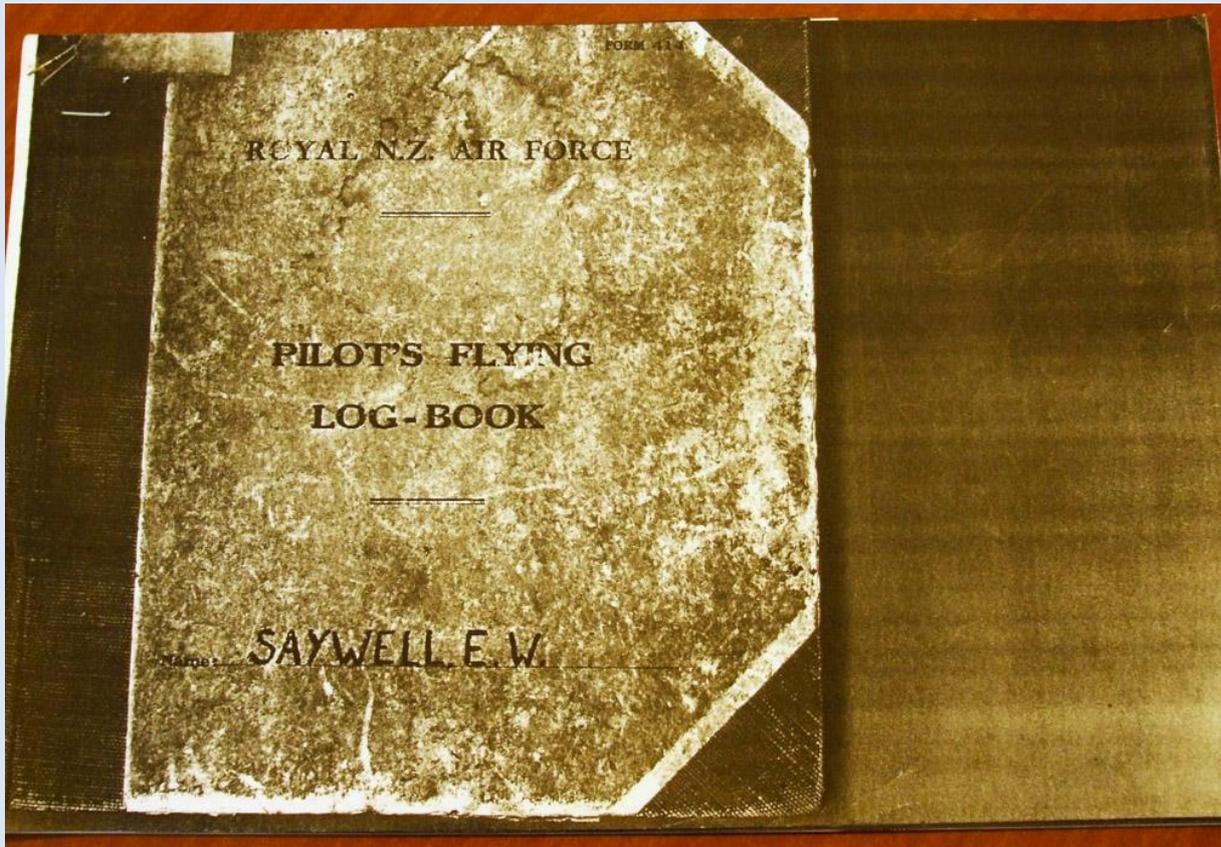
In August 2020, I was contacted by Wendy St. George, who found an article on the internet in which my name was mentioned relating to this crash site. Wendy, who is the niece of the deceased **pilot, Edward Saywell**, had been researching her Uncle's crash since 2004, with **Ron Wisson, who was the only survivor**. Unfortunately Ron passed away in 2008. Wendy had contact with a few Dutch researchers, one of them Marcel Hogenhuis who informed her of the crash location years ago. Over the past few months she has been in contact with me.



Wendy St. George



Wendy's uncle Edward Saywell



YEAR: 1943	AIRCRAFT.		PILOT, OR 1ST PILOT.	2ND PILOT, PUPIL, OR PASSENGER.	DUTY (INCLUDING RESULTS AND REMARKS).
	Type.	No.			
MONTH DATE	---	---	---	---	TOTALS BROUGHT FORWARD
JULY 13	HALIFAX	K	SELF	6 CREW	OPS AS ORDERED - AACHEN MISSING
				w/cor O.C. 35. SQUADRON	10 miles N. East of Aachen

The last flight entry in Edward Saywell's logbook. (Wendy St George)

On this internet site Ron's recollection of what happened that night is published. <http://www.102ceylonsquadron.co.uk/index.html>

On the 13th July our target was Aachen, and we carried a normal bomb load of HE incendiary bombs, as we were designated as a main force A/C on this our first 35 SQDN operation. The marker aircraft used to drop coloured flares onto the ground to mark the aiming point for the main force which followed. Back up aircraft dropped more flares onto the target indicator flares and also incendiary bombs to start fires which were also used as aiming points. There a several books which

have written which describe these techniques in detail, the best is probably Pathfinder written by Donald Bennet who was C in C of the PFF Command.

On the fateful night we took after dark from Graveley and headed for Germany, the flight was uneventful, with everybody keeping a good look out. We saw one or two searchlights and AA fire in the distance, we did not see the ground as there was partial cloud cover. About 20 or 30 miles from the target the navigator gave Ted a small course alteration towards the target which had not yet been illuminated by the marker aircraft. We were about 2 or 3 miles ahead of the main stream of the force which consisted of about 300 aircraft, as far as I remember.

The rear gunner called on the intercom enemy aircraft in sight, stand by to corkscrew, this was the basic evasion, to fly in a corkscrew motion, and once started the German night fighter would normally sheer off and look for another target which he could attack before he was sighted. We had experienced this a couple times before on previous ops.

As we started to corkscrew our gunners started firing, and we were hit by the German firing, which according to the rear gunner was a Messerschmitt 110. None of our crew had been hit, but our starboard wing and inner engine was hit and became a massive fire within seconds. The aircraft rapidly filled with smoke.

Ted gave the order to bail out, it was obvious that there was nothing the crew could do about the fire. I moved forward to the navigator's position, where Ernie had the floor escape hatch open, and was putting his parachute on. He shouted to me to get out which I did, feet first through the hatch. I had to push myself away from the aircraft. Shortly afterwards my parachute opened, though I do not remember pulling the release handle. I was swinging backwards and forwards, but this stopped after a few minutes and I was able to look around. I could not see the burning aircraft from which I had jumped, but then went into a bank of cloud which reduced visibility completely.

I had expected to see the aircraft above me as I am sure that Ted would have held it straight and level while the crew got out. His chances would have been much less as he would have been the last to leave the aircraft. I think that the aircraft must have gone into a spin or exploded killing all the crew instantly.

The ME 110 which attacked us had better armament than RAF bombers which had only .303 calibre machine guns in the rear and upper turrets. The German night fighters had 20mm cannons which were twice as big and had twice the range. So our chances were pretty poor. The night fighters would approach from below and behind where they could not be seen. The bomber was an easy target from that type of attack.

The area where we were shot down was I believe approximately 20 to 30 miles west of Munchen Gladbach and about 30 miles north of Aachen.

I seemed to be falling through cloud for quite a long time, and eventually came out and could see one or two glimmers of light on the ground, it was very dark. In the distance probably several miles away there was a large fire burning. I feel sure that it was our aircraft.

I hit the ground with a tremendous thump as I could not see it clearly enough to judge my height. My left ankle was twisted badly and it was very painful to stand. I was in the middle of a cornfield and could hear dogs barking and people shouting in the distance. I pulled my parachute into a bundle and crawled with it to a ditch at the side of the field. I crawled along the ditch for some distance away from the area where the corn had been flattened by my movements.

I hid in the ditch as I could hear voices nearby. Shortly after daybreak a farmer came along the outside of the field standing up in a horse drawn farm cart and armed with a pitch fork. I had obviously been spotted and could not run, so I had to surrender as he had jumped from the cart and was pointing the pitch fork at me in a very menacing manner.

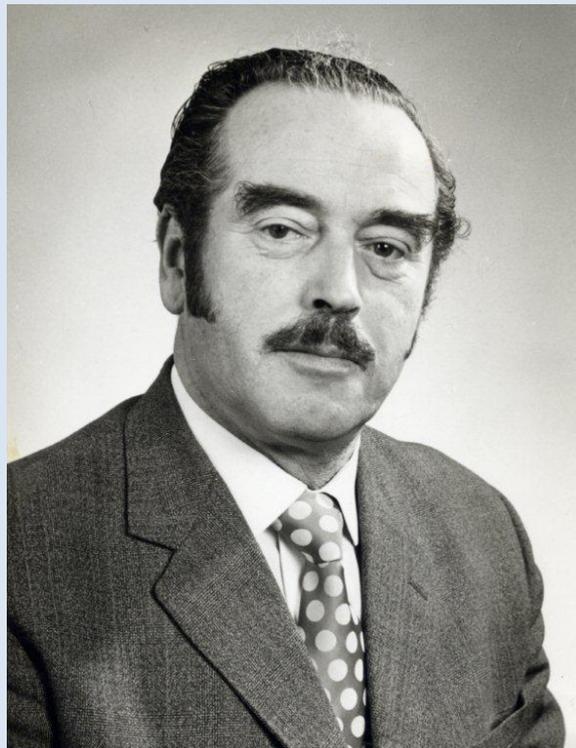
I was handed over to the police and then to the Luftwaffe. I ended up in a prison camp in East Prussia, Stalag Luft 6. The Luftwaffe told me

that the burnt out remains of a 35 Squadron Halifax had been found a few miles from where I was captured. They also told me that the unidentifiable remains of six bodies were in the aircraft.

I developed a deep sense of guilt finding it hard to come to terms that I was the only survivor. That feeling is still partially with me today 60 years later, though I have accepted the fact that they were all killed. I wrote a letter to Ted's parents which I sent through the RNZAF, I don't know whether they received it as there was no reply."



Ron Wisson as a crewmember



Post war

Ron's story of that night confirms that the six crewmembers were found inside the aircraft. All of them had the English nationality.

" the unidentifiable remains of six bodies were in the aircraft. "

Nobody knows where they are buried. Due to this, their names are listed on the Runnymede Memorial. The Air Forces Memorial at Runnymede commemorates by name over 20,000 men and women of the air forces, who were lost in the Second World War during operations from bases in the United Kingdom and North and Western Europe, and who have no known graves.

From Wendy's research : I have not found Edward Wright Saywells grave. There was a report written in 1950 by the RAF Grave Services which states the bodies of the airmen were removed from the plane wreckage by a German recovery team and they were buried in the Monchengladbach Cemetery. The report gave some grave numbers, but CWGC said that the numbers could not be matched with the crew of HR819 when at the end of the war the cemetery was reorganised. It seems that there is no record of the investigation done by CWGC to match bodies and graves.

Witness

During the course of our research, I visited the nearest house to the crash site and met the houseowner, Mr.Spolders. He was a 10- year- old when the aircraft crashed and lived in the town of Leuth. He remembered the crash site very well, as it was a few hundred yards from his current home. He remembered visiting the field the morning after it crashed. The crash site was sealed off by German soldiers. Mr.Spolders had no recollection of details but did remember aircraft parts laying around at the crash site.



The witness Mr.Spolder

Margaret

Edward Wright Saywell was the brother of Wendy's **mother, Margaret**. Edward was 20 years older than Margaret, who is 81 years old now and still living.

A selection of the remains of the aircraft were sent to Wendy. She took them to her mother and shared the outcome of her deliver, "When my mother held the badge in her hand, she said it "looked and felt familiar". It was fantastic to have this personal item home in New Zealand." Edward was the only crewmember with the New Zealand nationality on board; therefore, **the capbatch can only be his**.



Margaret with her brothers cap batch



The research team L to R : Joop, Peter and Peter, Sjaak

