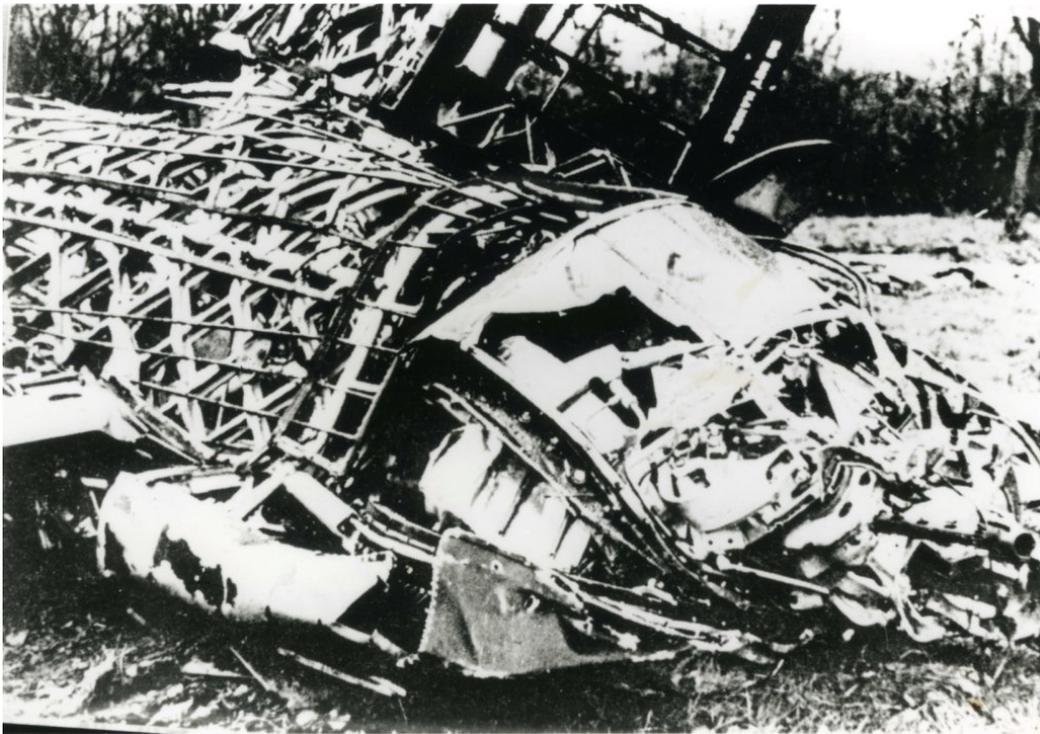


# The search for the identity of the crashed Wellington near Zevenbergen.



Is it the Z1475 of the PAF 300 Squadron,  
**OR** the X3552 of the RAF 150 Squadron?



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## REPORT

on the search for the identity of a Vickers-Wellington bomber,  
crashed on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1942 near Zevenbergen, Holland.

By Willem van Dranen.

### **Introduction**

In the night of 15<sup>th</sup> on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1942 a Wellington bomber crashed south-east of Zevenbergen, a small town in the north-western corner of the Dutch province of North-Brabant. For a long time, it was assumed that the aircraft belonged to the Polish 300 Squadron. However, over the years other researchers published articles in which 'proof' was given that it was a Wellington of the RAF 150 Squadron. Some remained convinced that it was the Polish aircraft. The result was confusion over the identity of the crashed Wellington.

I myself was confronted with the story of that Wellington in 2013, when I was involved in the project of erecting remembrance panels in the region for some of the crashed WW2 aircraft and its crews. The panel for the subject Wellington was put on hold because of the questions surrounding its identity. Since then, the problem has faded away on the priority list and it remained so till early 2018. In the spring of that year a documentary on Dutch television drew attention to the fact that many WW2 aircraft and their crews were still missing in Holland. And with the motto 'Rather Dead than Missing', the identity question of the Wellington near Zevenbergen was raised again. "It's now or never", I thought in March 2018 and planned to have a thorough look again at all the known facts of the crashed Wellington.

### **Report structure**

Firstly, all known facts about the two Wellingtons are summarized in a table. Differences are identified in foot notes. Secondly, local police reports are used to describe what happened on the night of 15 on 16 October 1942 and in the period directly after those dates. Also, the known graves and/or memorials regarding the crew members are mentioned. Thereafter the results of earlier research are presented. The remaining elements of the identity puzzle, which I have researched in the period 2018-2019 are listed. Next, the conclusions are described and some recommendations are given to modify the existing registrations. All used sources for this report are listed at the end of the paper.

### **The subject Wellingtons**

Basic facts of both Wellingtons can be found in the Operations Record Books (ORBs) of respectively 300 and 150 Squadrons. They are downloaded from the National Archive. All crashed aircraft are listed in a database of the Study Group Air War 1939-1945. That Study Group is abbreviated with its Dutch name as SGLO. The online database can be found on <https://www.verliesregister.studiegroepluchtoorlog.nl/> and is in English.

Both Wellingtons are registered as Loss Chart T1882A (Polish aircraft) and as Loss Chart T1882 (British aircraft). In the table on the next page the data is presented as recorded in the current Loss Charts. Please note that the crash location of the British Wellington in the Loss Register 2019 is quite different from the earlier registers of 2008 and 2011.

Data item	Polish Wellington	British Wellington
SGLO Loss Chart	T1882A	T1882
Wellington Mark	IV	III
Serial no.	Z1475 <sup>1</sup>	X3552 <sup>2</sup>
Squadron	300	150
Home base	RAF Ingham	RAF Snaith
Take-off time	18:40	18:50
Take-off date	15th October 1942	15th October 1942
Target	Cologne	Cologne
Estimated landing time	24:00-00:30	24:00-00:30
Shot down by	Oblt S. Machat	Oblt S. Machat
Luftwaffe unit	1.E./NJG 2	1.E./NJG 2
Crash time	23:15	23:46
Crew	5	6
Pilot	Sgt C. Szymen, PAF <sup>3</sup>	Sgt E.N. Smith, RAFVR
Co-pilot	-	P/O D.L. Hemming, RAFVR
Navigator & Bomb aimer	F/O P. Sobolewski, PAF	-
Navigator	-	Sgt P.C. Harrison, RAFVR
W-Ops	Sgt S. Piatek, PAF	
W-Ops / AG	-	F/Sgt P.W.S. Varley, RAFVR
Air Gunner	Sgt <sup>4</sup> M. Mielnik, PAF	F/Sgt D.L. Morrow, RCAF
Air Gunner	Sgt L.J. Bialy, PAF	-
Bomb aimer	-	P/O <sup>5</sup> F. Maxfield, RAFVR
Crash location in Loss Register: 2008, 2011	Zevenbergen (hamlet Hazeldonk)	North Sea (near the coast)
Crash location in Online Loss Register: 2019	Zevenbergen (hamlet Hazeldonk)	Crashed between Pootweg and Hazeldonksestrandweg se of Zevenbergen

*Table 1 – Summary of data in the Dutch Loss Register*

### **Night of 15 on 16 October 1942**

The RAF Operation launched on the 15th October 1942, was a bombing raid on the city of Cologne. Nearly 300 bombers were deployed. From a military point of view the attack was a failure. Only 240 of the around 70.000 bombs were released. Only 2 houses were classed as seriously damaged and (fortunately) only 4 citizens were wounded. Eighteen aircraft were either shot down on the approach or return routes or

<sup>1</sup> In ORB the a/c no. is given as X-1475. In many other sources the number is Z1475. The RAF Museum has confirmed that Z1475 is the correct number.

<sup>2</sup> In ORB the a/c no. is given as X.3553 (on other dates also). The number X.3552 is not mentioned in the ORB. In many other sources the registration number is: X3552. According to the RAF Museum X3552 is the correct serial number. X3553 has never been issued to 150 sq.

<sup>3</sup> In this report 'Polish Air Force' is abbreviated as PAF.

<sup>4</sup> In Loss Chart the rank of Mielnik is F/Sgt. According to his Record of Service he was promoted to Sergeant on 20 March 1942. In ORB and on the website [www.polishwargraves.nl/ned/z1475.htm](http://www.polishwargraves.nl/ned/z1475.htm) his rank is also Sgt. The rank in de Loss Chart is therefore incorrect.

<sup>5</sup> In ORB is his rank Sgt. In Loss Chart, on the CWGC website and on the headstone is the rank of Maxfield P/O. The RAF Museum confirmed that Maxfield was promoted to P/O on 14 August 1942. Thus, the ORB was in October 1942 not up-to-date.

were lost for other reasons. Two Wellingtons were downed above West-Brabant or Zeeland. One of them came down south-east of Zevenbergen.

### **Reports Municipal Police Zevenbergen**

Officer P. van Gulp of the Municipal Police and sergeant P. van der Valk of the Military Police Brigade Zevenbergen were quickly at the crash scene. Van Gulp wrote a report the next day (Friday 16th October 1942). The main points in that report are:

- At about 23:15 hours the police received a report that an air battle had taken place and that an aircraft had crashed in flames.
- At the crash location other officials were already present. Amongst them the mayor of the village Etten and military police officials from the Brigades at Etten and Zevenbergen.
- The local police officers saw that the aircraft was an English bomber, a Vickers-Wellington<sup>6</sup>.
- The crash location was a piece of farmland, used by the brothers Van Aart, next to the road called 'Hazeldonkse Zandweg' in Zevenbergen.
- The following four dead bodies were noted:
  - One body, completely clothed in an aviator's uniform, next to the wreckage.
  - An almost entirely charred torso, with a leg and intestines nearby, was found at about 20 meters from the wreck.
  - At about 200 meters from the wreckage, caught in between aircraft parts (probably a gun turret) a third corpse was found, also dressed in an aviator's uniform.
  - At a distance of about 300 meters from the wreck, we found a fourth body, also dressed in an aviator's uniform.
- The guarding of the crash site was handed over to the Germans at about 4:30 hours a.m.

On the 17th October 1942 a German airplane landed in the immediate vicinity of the crashed Wellington. The Chief Municipal Police Zevenbergen, officer W. van Baal, wrote a report about that event. The main points in that report are:

- An airplane from Luftwaffe airbase Gilze and Rijen landed at about 4:15 p.m.
- Two German Luftwaffe officers observed that the crashed bomber was not the aircraft that they were looking for.
- After comments by the German Guard at the wreckage that they had nothing further to do at the crash site, the two officers flew away at about 4:25 p.m.

### **Report by the Air Raid Precautions Organization**

The Air Raid Precautions Organization (ARPO) of Zevenbergen had two observations posts in WW2. One on the tower of the Reformed Church in Zevenbergen and one in the nearby village of Zevenbergschen Hoek. It is known that both posts did observe 'a burning object in the air with an enormous noise at about 11:00 p.m.'. The post in Zevenbergschen Hoek observed further that the burning object flew in a downwards glidepath in the direction of Oudenbosch and that the noise stopped at about 12:00 p.m. The observations are recorded in the observation logbooks.

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<sup>6</sup> How the local police knew that the aircraft was a Vickers-Wellington is unknown.

## Crash location

At first instance the ARPO Zevenbergen reported that the aircraft crashed within the (former) municipality of Beek (nowadays Prinsenbeek, west of Breda). But officer Van Gulp and sergeant Van der Valk found the crashed aircraft “between the Pootweg and the Hazeldonkschezandweg, within the municipality of Zevenbergen”. Later, German documents showed as crash location ‘Hazeldonk’. Although there is more than one ‘Hazeldonk’ in Brabant, misunderstanding can be ruled out as in the police report of 16<sup>th</sup> October 1942 the name of the polder (Oudland of Zevenbergen) is quoted. See illustration 1 for the crash location, plotted on a map of around 1940.



Illustration 1 – Crash location Wellington, 1942.

## Cemeteries and memorials for crew members

The names of the crew members of both Wellingtons are listed on a number of websites. Also, the names are on memorials. Some names are on headstones in cemeteries. Below is stated where these names can be found.

British Wellington. The names of the six crew members of the British Wellington are on the CWGC website. Four of them are on the Runnymede Memorial. These are:

- P/O Douglas Leonard Hemming, panel 70;
- F/Sgt Donald Lloyd Morrow, panel 105;
- Sgt Eric Norman Smith, panel 93;
- F/Sgt Peter Worthington Samuel Varley, panel 76.

On Loss Chart T1882 those four airmen are listed in the column ‘Cemetery’ that they are on the Runnymede Memorial and in the column ‘Remark’ as being buried as ‘unknown’ on the British War Cemetery in Bergen op Zoom. That remark is added to the Loss Chart following the results of an earlier research in 2007.

Two bodies were washed up on the Dutch coast later and buried on local cemeteries. These two are:

- Sgt Philip Charles Harrison, washed ashore on 23rd Nov 1942 at Scheveningen and buried thereafter on the cemetery Westduin in Den Haag, row 2 grave 37. See illustration 2 for the headstone.
- P/O Frederick Maxfield, found (presumably by a German patrol boat) in the Wadden Sea on 2nd Dec 1942. His body is buried on the cemetery in the village of Ulrum in the province of Groningen, row G/H, grave 8. See illustration 3 for the headstone.



Illustration 2 – Headstone Sgt Harrison



Illustration 3 – Headstone P/O Maxfield

Polish Wellington. According to the Loss Chart T1882A the names of the 5 crew members of the Polish Wellington are listed on the Northolt Polish War Memorial (illustration 4). In addition, the names are listed on the website [www.polishwargraves.nl/info/mem.northolt.2007.pdf](http://www.polishwargraves.nl/info/mem.northolt.2007.pdf). Panel numbers are as follows:

- Sgt Lech Józef Bialy, panel 4;
- Sgt Michal Mielnik, panel 44;
- Sgt Czeslaw Szymen, panel 70;
- F/O Piotr Sobolewski, panel 65;
- Sgt Stanislaw Piatek, panel 53.



Illustration 4 – The Polish War Memorial, Northolt

In the data field 'Additional Sources' it is stated that 'Four of the crew were buried as Unknown at Bergen op Zoom War Cem.' The website [www.polishwargraves.nl](http://www.polishwargraves.nl) also states that four of the five Polish crew members are buried in Bergen op Zoom (BoZ).

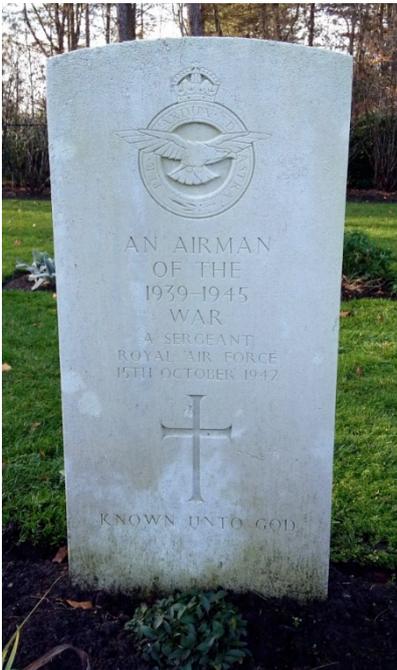
Graves in Bergen op Zoom. In the British War Cemetery at Bergen op Zoom are four graves with the date 15 October 1942. These are: row 24B, graves 8 and 9 and row 27A, graves 1 and 2. Pictures of the four headstones are below:



*Illustration 5 – Graves 24B8-9 at Bergen op Zoom*



*Illustration 6a - Grave 27A1 at BoZ*



*Illustration 6b - Grave 27A2 at BoZ*

On the headstones 27A1-2 is the RAF emblem, not on the two other headstones. The headstone of grave 27A2 is furthermore engraved with 'A sergeant RAF'. On the other three headstones no identification of rank is given. One thing is clear, the four graves with the date 15 October 1942 can only be for four of the six British crew members or four of the five Polish crew members.

## Earlier investigations

The late Jos van Alphen investigated the crash of the Wellington at Zevenbergen from 1998. In his first article in the Air War Bulletin of the Study Group Air War 1939-1945 in December 2007, he gave an overview of the then available sources. He also mentioned the interview he had with the former sergeant of the Dutch Military Police, Van der Mooren. His name was given in the Police Report of 16 October 1942 and he was present at the crash site. Van der Mooren saw on the nose of the aircraft, which was relatively undamaged, some 'strange signs' perhaps a logo (roundel) with 'Polish characters' underneath. However, Van Alphen then got in contact with Mrs. Betty Clements, the widow of the Polish Mosquito pilot Kazimierz Jaworski and a researcher of the Polish bomber squadrons. She argued that the Wellington could have been the X3552 of 150 RAF Squadron. The crest of that squadron had a motto in Greek characters 'ΑΓΕΙ ΦΘΑΝΟΜΕΝ', meaning 'Always Ahead', see illustration 7. Those Greek characters were also 'strange signs'. Van Alphen then writes that the crashed aircraft could well have been the British Wellington. He continues in his article with: "It is the question if the proper authorities In England will acknowledge the findings, but for me the facts are clear". Nevertheless, he doesn't come to a final conclusion. Although, his thought that it was the British Wellington, was supported by a reaction of another researcher, Theo Boiten, in an article in the Air War Bulletin of January 2008, stating: "I have found a Luftwaffe Nachtjager (Night Fighter) claim ... that wonderfully matches this Wellington: Oberleutnant (F/O) Machat ... 150 Sqn Wellington X3552."



*Illustration 7 - Crest  
150 sq RAF*

In 2007 Van Alphen wrote a letter to the Service Personnel & Veterans Agency of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) in London, strongly requesting that the inscription of the name of Sgt Eric Smith be added to the headstone of grave 27A2. He used the following argument in support of his request: 'In the British Wellington X3552 there was only one sergeant, the pilot Eric N. Smith. On the British War Cemetery at Bergen op Zoom there is only one headstone with the date 15 October 1942 and with a mention of that rank.' The answer of the Agency in October 2007 was that: "the initial findings have concluded that there is insufficient information to confirm that the grave to which you refer is that of Sgt Smith". The Agency continues with the observations that at the reburial in Bergen op Zoom a second sergeant was found; that the remains also could have been from the Wellingtons BK339 or the Z1475; that a Ration Card was found from RAF Hemswell, the home base of some Polish Air Force squadrons (300 Sqn – at that time detached at RAF Ingham – and 305 Sqn).

In an article in the Air War Bulletin of February 2008, Van Alphen returns to his previous finding that it was the British Wellington. He writes: "about the same time as my article was published in the Air War Bulletin of December 2007, I received new information that my earlier assumption that the crashed Wellington was the X3552 of 150 Squadron was wrong. It must surely have been the Wellington Z1475 of the Polish 300 Squadron." Now, Van Alphen draws the conclusion that the 'strange signs' that sergeant Van der Mooren saw were indeed Polish, just as Van der Mooren told him during the interview.

One question remained for him, and that was the fact that the Z1475 had five crew members and that only four were buried in Bergen op Zoom. He pointed to a

neighbouring grave with the inscription 'Unknown Airman'. Van Alphen then writes that: "In England an investigation would be undertaken to try to identify where this unknown airman was originally buried."

The whole story of the crashed Wellington was later published in the periodical '*Oud Nieuws*' ('*Old News*') of the historical association *Willem van Strijen* in Zevenbergen (no. 89, December 2009). The findings of Jos van Alphen were the basis and the article was written together with Hans van Dordrecht. In particular a few eyewitness testimonies were incorporated in the story. This leads to some differences and additions compared to the two police reports of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> October 1942. Striking points are as follows:

- On the 16th October, Mr. Leen Boot, working at the Zevenbergen municipality, received an order to help to put the bodies in coffins. He saw that next to the aircraft wreckage, neatly in line, were four bodies of the crew. The bodies were reasonably intact and they were transported to the carpentry factory of the brothers Matthee, at the Molenstraat in Zevenbergen. They had received an order from the Germans to make four coffins. Thereafter, the coffins were transported to the cemetery Zuylen in Breda.
- The clothing of the bodies showed that the men who had to put the bodies in coffins, concluded that they were 'English aviators'. But there were no rank or national badges to be seen and this created some confusion. On the wreckage of the aircraft were some strange texts and the men thought that they were Greek signs, certainly not English.
- The first Germans who arrived at the crash site had already searched the bodies and confiscated the personal belongings. Later, a rumour was heard that one of the Germans had thrown the ID papers (and perhaps the ID Tags) into a burning stove at a local bar with the remark: "Those guys have bombed my city!"
- The aircraft that landed on the 17th October had a number of high officers on board and they investigated the remnants of the aircraft accurately and they took some pictures.
- After a few days the crash site was cleared again; the Germans had removed everything.
- Later, a ticket was found in one of the uniforms of a 'canteen pass' of the airfield Hemswell in England.

### **My own research**

When I put together the first edition of the crash chart for north-west Brabant (The 'Westhoek') in 2013, I was confronted with the crashed Wellington. Then it was generally accepted that the Wellington was Polish. In the period 2013-2015 I tried to get answers to some remaining questions regarding the real identity of the aircraft and its crew. Final answers were not received or found and the whole story faded into the background.

Partly as a result of the action by the SGLO 'Rather dead than missing', I started again with the research in early 2018. The articles in the Air Bulletin by Jos van

Alphen contain enough question marks and I was eager to know which questions he had put forward to which institutions in England and on which questions he received an answer. Therefore, my first action was to find the archive of the late Jos van Alphen. That wasn't easy but, in the end, I received the digital files about the crashed Wellington from the family Van Alphen.

Additionally, I have (by letter or e-mail) written to the following institutions abroad:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), Maidenhead, England
- MOD UK, Air Historic Branch (RAF), RAF Northolt, England
- MOD UK, APC Disclosures 5 (Polish), Northolt, England
- MOD UK, RAF Disclosures, RAF College Cranwell, England
- Polish Airforce Museum in Dęblin, Poland
- Polish Aviation Museum in Krakow, Poland
- Polish Air Force Memorial Committee, Northolt, England
- RAF Ingham Heritage Centre, Fillingham, England
- RAF Museum, London, England

Mr. Van Alphen wrote in one of his articles that he experienced difficulties in getting answers from those "stiff authorities in England". My experience in communication with UK authorities was different. Yes, it took sometimes many months before I received an answer. But, in all fairness I must say that the reaction of the CWGC was surprisingly fast. I have exchanged many e-mails with them and received a relevant reply within days. From the Polish institutions I did not receive, in spite of reminders, any response in connection with my query.

### **Remaining pieces of the puzzle**

Together with the remaining questions in a.o. the article in *Oud Nieuws*, I have listed the pieces of the puzzle that must be found to determine the identity of the crashed aircraft. These puzzle pieces are:

- Who has shot down the Wellington?
- What is the meaning of those 'strange signs', seen on the aircraft?
- Did the Germans register anything about the removal of the wreckage?
- The number of crew members.
- The recognisability of the uniforms and badges.
- Is more known about that 'canteen pass' from RAF Hemswell?
- How can the inspection by German officers on 17<sup>th</sup> October be explained?

### **The adversary**

If the data in both Loss Charts are correct, then Oberleutnant (Oblt, equal to Flying Officer) Stefan Machat (?-1943) shot down two Wellingtons in the night of 15 and 16 October 1942. Nothing is impossible in wartime, but it would be very remarkable in my opinion. Therefore, I searched on the internet for further information. The Kracker database on [www.aircrewremembered.com](http://www.aircrewremembered.com) shows indeed that he shot down two Wellingtons. However, one on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1942 and one on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1943. Furthermore, as locations is given: on 15<sup>th</sup> October near Hazeldonk (a hamlet southeast of Zevenbergen) and in February 1943 near Tunis, Africa. The claim for the Wellington near Zevenbergen is named 'Oblt Nachat' of ErfStab/NJG-2 and it is most likely that the surname is misspelled and should read 'Machat'.

As already mentioned above, Theo Boiten has written in Air War Bulletin of January 2008 that according to him the claim of Oblt Machat fits the downing of the RAF Wellington X3552. I received from him, in November 2008 the information that he

now thought that the claim was applicable to the Polish Wellington Z1475. I wondered why the change, how could it be possible? When asked, Theo's reaction was: "Hans Ring (German investigator) assumed at the time that it was the X3552, but further research revealed that this assumption was not correct. In the Nachtjagd Combat Archive (NCA) I have now written: Two Nachtjäger (of 12./NJG1 and 4./NJG2) and Flak claimed a total of four Wellingtons shot down off the Dutch coast and in the Frisian Islands chain, whereas, in fact, three *Wimpeys* were lost over the sea. Another claim for a Wellington shot down, to the west of Breda by Oblt. Machat of E./NJG2, concerns the loss of 300 Squadron Z1475, which crashed at Zevenbergen/Hazeldonk, reportedly at 23.15 hrs. Hptm. Dr. Patuschka achieved two confirmed victories west of Goeree. His first claim can probably be tied to the loss of 150 Squadron X3552: one crew member<sup>7</sup> later washed ashore near Den Haag on the south to North Sea currents<sup>8</sup>."

Oblt Machat has apparently received for both claims a trophy, see illustrations 8a and 8b. On the website [www.925-1000.com](http://www.925-1000.com) (an online encyclopaedia about silver marks, etc.) the following is found:

- Cups were bought in Denmark by a person on a flea-market. How they got there is unknown.
- A Dutch member on 'Silver Forum' of that website has found out that the cups were made in 1941 respectively 1942 by the firm Begeer in Utrecht, Holland.
- Engraving on the cups seems to have been done later.



Illustration 8a – Trophy 1



Illustration 8b – Trophy 2

During a meeting of the Study Group Air War 1939-1945 in November 2018, Theo Boiten delivered a lecture on his NCA and said a.o. that the Luftwaffe didn't frivolously award such a trophy. A 'Claims Committee' had to research all known facts and after careful consideration could agree or disagree with a claim.

It may be assumed that Machat, operating from Luftwaffe airbase Gilze and Rijen, in the night of 15 on 16 October 1942 shot down only one Wellington. In theory, the British or the Polish aircraft. However, on the basis of the NCA data it can be stated with a reasonable certainty that Oblt Stefan Machat shot down the Polish Air Force Wellington Z1475 on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1942.

<sup>7</sup> This concerns Sgt P.C. Harrison, the navigator of the X3552.

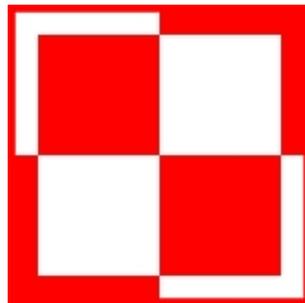
<sup>8</sup> The second crew member of the X3552 washed ashore, P/O F. Maxfield, is here not (yet) listed.

On the basis on the NCA data, it can also be assumed that the RAF Wellington X3552 (most probably) is downed by Hauptman Dr. Horst Patuschka. Theo Boiten provided further data about the crash location as follows: “Hptm. Dr. Horst Patuschka of 4./NJG2, one Wellington, in sea 40km West of Goeree (prop. Biber), height 3100m, time 23:29, probably 150 Sqn Wellington X3552”.

### Strange signs

Jos van Alphen interviewed at the end of the nineties the Military Police Sergeant Van der Mooren. Regrettably, the archive of Van Alphen does not contain a (handwritten) note of that interview. Therefore, I had to base myself on the information Van Alphen had written in an Air War Bulletin (nr. 291, December 2007). According to Van Alphen, Van der Mooren testified that “the aircraft was nearly totally burned and parts e.g. a gun turret, were spread around. Only the nose was reasonably undamaged and on it there was clearly a logo painted with underneath Polish characters”. Strictly speaking Van Alphen pushed that testimony a bit to the side and he turned to the possibility that the logo on the aircraft nose was of 150 Sqn (see illustration 7). I have asked the RAF Museum if such logos were normally painted on RAF airplanes during WW2. The answer by curator Gordon Leith was: “During wartime RAF aircraft did not carry squadron badges as this would have provided useful information to the enemy if they were captured, so I don’t think the writing on the Wellington’s nose would have been 150 Squadron’s Greek motto”. With such an answer, the possibility that the Wellington was the X3552 became much smaller.

In two Air War Bulletins later, Van Alphen returns to the testimony of Van der Mooren. He now concludes that on the basis of the logo and the Polish characters it must have been the Polish Wellington Z1475. I have tried to find a picture of a 300 Sqn aircraft with that logo and Polish text, but found nothing. On pretty much every picture of a Polish aircraft the Polish logo<sup>9</sup>, see illustration 9, can be seen.



*Illustration 9 – Logo of Polish aircraft flying in the RAF*

Pictures of aircraft of the Polish 304 and 305 squadrons do have often the Polish text: UWAGA NA ŚMIGŁO (beware of the propeller); see illustrations 10a and 10b.

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<sup>9</sup> Known to the PAF as the ‘Szachownica’ (Chess-Board) their national marking.

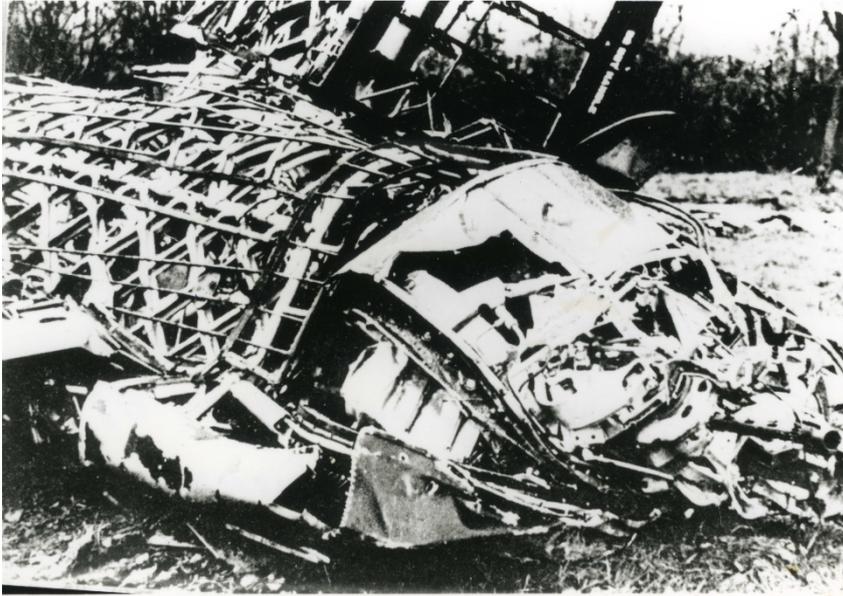


*Illustration 10a and b – Logo and text on Wellington of 304 Sqn*

Regrettably, the testimony of Van der Mooren does not say what the logo looked like. Was it round, square and which colours did it have? Also, regarding those 'strange signs', it is not given if it was Latin or Greek writing or something else. The labourers that had to put the bodies in coffins thought that the 'strange signs' were Greek. In short, there is no hard evidence which logo and which 'strange signs' were on the reasonably undamaged aircraft nose. It can be excluded that the 150 Sqn badge was on the nose. Therefore, it surely must have been that Polish Air Force badge. All together it is an indication of the identity of the aircraft and thus the nationality of the crew.

### **Clearing of the wreckage**

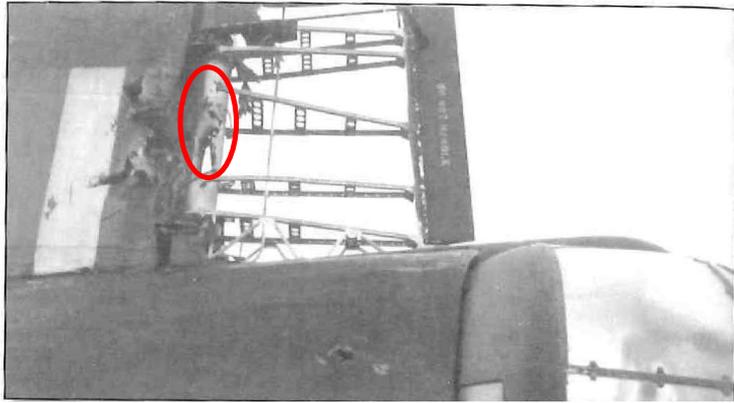
During the war, certainly in the period 1940-1944, all aircraft wreckage was cleared by the Germans. They had a 'Zerlegetrieb', a kind of 'recycle factory' in a.o. Utrecht. The eyewitness Ad de Gast saw that rather soon after the crash the Germans had cleared the site and all aircraft parts were taken away. Of the wreckage a picture is known (see illustration 11a; taken by Mr. W. Meulblok) and in the upper right corner something of lettering is to be seen. Zooming in on that area the text seems to read 'DO NOT HANDLE', see illustration 11b.



*Illustration 11a – Wreckage of the Wellington*

The RAF Museum was questioned if such text was standard on Wellingtons; as a text 'off factory'. Their answer was: "I have found very few photographs of Wellingtons with the "Do Not Handle" stencil marking on the rudder trim tab, but two photographs showing it on aircraft of 304 Squadron are attached. It may be just a co-incidence that 304 Squadron was Polish or it may indicate that the aircraft wreckage in the photograph you sent was from a Polish squadron too!"

The two 'attached' photographs are from the book by Mariusz Konarski, titled *304 Squadron, Wellingtons against the U-boats*, published in 2005, page 20 (illustration 12) and 55 (illustration 13). These two pictures have (indeed a bit vague) the same text on the rudder trim tab of a Wellington. Thus, the only proof is that the aircraft at Zevenbergen was a Wellington and that the text 'Do not handle' was probably standard on every Wellington. I have searched for Wellingtons of RAF squadrons but found no clear illustration of a tail section. Mostly the available pictures are of crews at the front of their aircraft.



*Illustration 12 – Rudder trim tab with 'DO NOT HANDLE', (p20)*



*Illustration 13 – Rudder trim tab with 'DO NOT HANDLE' (p55)*

It is well known that the Germans worked very 'grundlich' (thoroughly) and that they documented a lot of detail. Therefore, I expected that something relating to the cleared Wellington might be found in the German archives. For that, I contacted Peter van Kaathoven, a researcher who is more familiar with the 'recycling activities' employed by the Germans in WW2. Regrettably nothing has been found (yet) in the available archives. Thus, the identity of the aircraft cannot be ascertained via this route.

Locally I have tried, via the historical society of Zevenbergen, to check if in those days of October 1942 souvenir hunters might have been busy at the crash site. Thus far nothing has come to light regarding any remnants of the Wellington, which might be in a Zevenbergen house. It could be, that nobody got the chance to pinch anything, as eyewitness reports say that the site was rather quickly cleared of material and also that the site was guarded by the Germans. There could however, still be some metal fragments/parts in the ground, but no research has been carried out. Some years ago, a large horticulture complex was built on the site, see illustration 14. It is not known if any aircraft fragments/parts were found during the building of the complex.

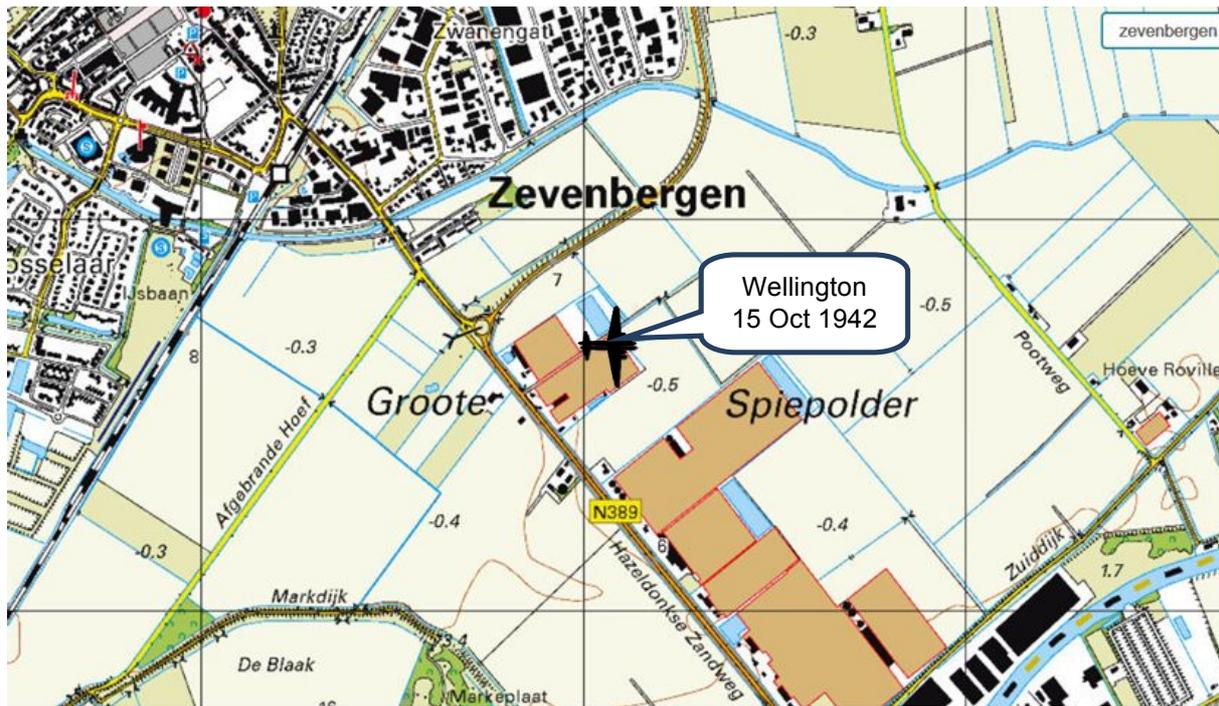


Illustration 14 – Crash location Wellington, 2017.

### Number of crew members

From the beginning, the number of crew members in the crashed Wellington was a point of discussion. On the basis of facts that the British Wellington, at the moment of its crash, had only 4 crew members left on board, that in the police report by constable Van Gulp only 4 bodies were noted and that there were 4 graves in Breda and later in Bergen op Zoom, it was a logical conclusion to think that it was the Wellington X3552 that crashed near Zevenbergen.

In the Air War Bulletin in which Van Alphen draws the conclusion that it must have been the Polish Wellington, he writes about the missing fifth person the following: “One question remains. Only four Airmen were found. The fifth crew member can be totally burned but it is also possible that he jumped from the Wellington earlier”. The latter supposition is also to be seen on [www.polishwargraves.nl/ned/z1475.htm](http://www.polishwargraves.nl/ned/z1475.htm). Van Alphen noted that in Bergen op Zoom, next to grave 24B9 (with the inscription ‘15 October 1942’), a grave 24B10 is with ‘Unknown Airman RAF’. In an e-mail in 2013 he asked me if I knew anything about an airman buried somewhere in the Westhoek (northwest corner of North-Brabant) who was later reburied in grave 24B10 in Bergen op Zoom. My answer was then negative. At the end of 2018, I asked the CWGC the same question and from their response I learned that the ‘Unknown Airman RAF’ was removed from Drongelen (in the region ‘Land van Heusden’, about 35 kms from Zevenbergen ‘as the crow flies’) to Bergen op Zoom.

The first supposition that ‘the fifth crew member could have been completely burned’ is however not correct. When the police report by Van Gulp is carefully read through again, it becomes clear that he had seen “an almost entirely charred torso, with some body parts nearby and three intact bodies, completely clothed in aviator's uniforms”. Mr. Leen Boot, who was to put the bodies in coffins, saw that next to the wreckage, neatly in a row, four bodies of crew members. Those bodies were reasonably intact. It could be that the Germans have discovered the fourth body in the reasonably undamaged nose of the aircraft, perhaps that of the pilot or the front air gunner. Leen

Boot didn't say anything about 'an almost entirely charred torso, with some body parts nearby', as is written in the police report of 16 October. Therefore, the fifth crew member would not seem to have been totally burned and that in total there were five airmen killed in action.

The four 'reasonably intact' bodies were buried a few days after the 16<sup>th</sup> October in the Cemetery Zuylen in Breda as 'Unbekannt' (unknown) in the graves 211-214 in row 16. In October 1946, No. 80 Graves Concentration Unit (GCU) of the British Army exhumed the four bodies and reburied them at the British Cemetery in Bergen op Zoom in graves 24B9-10 and 27A1-2. Later, the headstones were placed as shown in illustrations 5, 6a and 6b.

Searching for information about the fifth body on the CWGC website, I suddenly came across a Graves Concentration Report which is reproduced in illustration 15. And, surprise, on serial numbers 2, 3, 7-10 there are six 'Unknowns' listed with the KIA date of 15 October 1942. And, all six are from cemetery Zuylen in Breda. For a moment I thought: "was it after all the British Wellington?" Well, that aircraft had 6 men onboard and the Polish aircraft had only 5! However, I realised that this was impossible because two men were later washed ashore on the Dutch coast! Result: total confusion. Not only for me; the number of casualties had for some time been a point of concern amongst researchers of the crashed Wellington. However, the thought 'it was the British aircraft' could be dismissed rather quickly because on the Graves Registration Report the indicated graves on Bergen op Zoom (25-C-1 and 25-C-2) were the collective graves for the 5 Canadians of the Wellington HE981. Naturally I have asked CWGC for clarification and their response was: "when the bodies were moved from Zuylen to Bergen op Zoom they were initially incorrectly marked in Bergen with wooden crosses stating that these graves contained 'Unknown Flyers 15-10-1942'. This mistake was later corrected".

**GRAVES CONCENTRATION REPORT FORM**

BAOR/Concen/Pre-D/444  
*Holland 641 E-129* Report No.

The following ~~has~~ <sup>has</sup> been concentrated here:—  
have (Name of Cemetery) BERGEN-OP-ZOOM, British Cemetery, HOLLAND.  
(Full Map Reference) GSGS 4042, 1/250,000 Sht 2A/3A D.650285.  
(S.M. S.W. ROOSENDAL)

(1) Serial No.	(2) Regt or Corps	(3) Army No.	(4) Name & Initials	(5) Rank	(6) Date of Death	(7) K/A, D/W or Died	(8) Plot	(9) Row	(10) Grave	(11) Date of Reburial	Previous location of grave	
											Place & Map Ref.	Report Number *
1	R. A. F. (VR)	1332036	FISHER, E.H.	Sgt	22.6.43	K/A	XXV	B	4	10.10.46	Temp. Bur. Ground E/15786 Outside Zuylen Prot 194	BAOR/PRE-D/571
2			UNKNOWN		15.10.42		XXV	C	1		Cem. GSGS 2541 Sht 4 1/100,000 928354	203 572
3			UNKNOWN	Sgt	"	"	XXV	C	2			204 572
4	R. A. F.	573474	PEGLER, G.	"	17.5.43	"	XXIV	B	5			201 574
5	R. C. A. F.	1299446	JAYE, T.F.	"	"	"	XXIV	B	6		Collective	200 574
6	R. C. A. F.	R.119416	ARTHUR, J.L.	"	"	"	XXIV	B	6		Marking.	200 574
7	R. A. F. (VR)	1600540	LONG, W.C. A.	"	"	"	XXIV	B	7			199 574
8			UNKNOWN		15.10.42	"	XXIV	B	9			214 570
9			"		"	"	XXVII	A	1			212 570
10			"		"	"	XXIV	B	8			211 570
11			"	Sgt	"	"	XXVII	A	2			213 570
12			"		"	"						

Date 27 Jan. 47. *Kos 24-10-47*

\* Where a grave has not already been registered, a Registration Report on A.F.W. 3372 will be prepared, and attached to this FORM.

(Signed) *[Signature]*  
Rank & Appointment \_\_\_\_\_ Colonel  
D., D., G., R., E. PSS. 3055. 12.4

Illustration 15 – Graves Concentration Report with six Airmen KIA on 15-10-1942.

I have asked the CWGC if there was in Bergen op Zoom an 'unknown' grave and if the relevant reburial records have a description that is similar with the description of an 'almost entirely charred torso' in the police report of police officer Van Gulp. The CWGC answered: "Descriptions of remains are not held on our database. We would need to check every exhumation report for Bergen-op-Zoom War Cemetery to undertake such a search. However, I have undertaken a search of any recoveries in the area of Zevenbergen, but I failed to find any potential candidates."

What happened to the 5<sup>th</sup> airman can only be guessed. Would the Germans have hoed his remains under the ground at the crash location? No, I don't think so; the Germans handled their enemies KIA, certainly in 1942, rather respectful. Could they have buried the remains somewhere else? That's most probable, but it's absolutely unknown where and how. Therefore, what happened to the 5<sup>th</sup> airman remains (for the time being) a mystery.

Conclusion with regard to the number of crew members of the crashed Wellington is that there were 5 airmen on board. Four are buried in Bergen op Zoom and one remains missing.

### **Uniforms and badges of rank**

If identification papers and tags of killed military are missing, then it's often possible to identify the nationality and/or which part of the armed forces the person concerned belonged to on the basis of the worn uniform and/or badges of rank. That has apparently not happened at the burial of the four bodies in Breda. At least, that's the view until today. When the four bodies were exhumed in 1946 and reburied in Bergen op Zoom, the GCU has apparently looked carefully for recognisable items to identify the victims. The CWGC informed me in April 2018 that: "According to the Exhumation Reports each of the individuals was dressed in RAF clothing. Two of the uniforms had Sergeant chevrons attached".

In the X3552 there was (next to Harrison) another sergeant on board, the pilot Eric Smith. Besides two Flight Sergeants (F/Sgt), Morrow and Varley. In the Z1475 were four sergeants, Baily, Mielnik, Szymen and Piatek. The CWGC wrote later that: "However, as Flight Sergeants simply had the addition of a crown above such stripes, it is possible this was not found or had been destroyed, so I would not rule out this rank." Taking into account that in 1946 the bodies were already buried for four years, it could be possible that the crown above the sergeant's chevrons (see illustration 16) was decayed, especially if the crown was embroidered. Or at least so much damaged that it was unnoticed by the GCU. This means that in the graves 27A1 and 27A2 lie:

- one F/Sgt or a sergeant of the X3552, or
- two sergeants of the Z1475.



Illustration 16 – Sergeant's and Flight Sergeant's chevrons RAF



Illustration 17 – Shoulder title

I don't know if such a Flight Sergeant's crown can decay in four years; I have no experience with regard to such topics. But it seems to me that something (if it was there in the first place) should be visible after such a short span of time. If the crown of the F/Sgt badge was made of metal, the chance that something should be visible is higher in my opinion.

Polish airmen, serving with the RAF, had normally their nation's emblem (see illustration 17) on their uniform shoulders. The headstones do not indicate anything about the nationality. That was a reason to ask the CWGC and their reaction was: "They would be marked as Polish Air Force if clear evidence of this was found, but no evidence was found on the uniforms to indicate that these individuals were Polish Airmen".

Based on the above, it cannot be concluded with a 100% certainty that the uniforms and badges of rank indicate that the four bodies in Bergen op Zoom are of four British or four Polish airmen.

#### **'Canteen pass'**

During Jos van Alphen's research it became known that later a 'ticket for a canteen pass of Hemswell' was found on one of the bodies. Later on, that was described as a 'canteen pass' in (Dutch) publications. According to the CWGC that 'canteen pass' was found at the reburial in Bergen op Zoom. It turned out to be a Cigarette Ration Card, issued by the Sergeant's Mess of RAF Station Hemswell. Then the question arises as to what the relationship can be between RAF Hemswell and the home base of 150 and 300 Squadrons.

#### **Home Base**

150 Squadron RAF operated, according to the ORB, off RAF Station Snaith. The squadron arrived there in July 1941 and moved on 15 October 1942 (the day that the X3552 crashed) to RAF Kirmington. The squadron moved later, in November 1944, to RAF Hemswell. But, in October 1942 RAF Snaith was the home base of 150 Squadron.

The 300 Squadron operated according to its ORB of that time from RAF Ingham (to where it was detached). But Jos van Alphen came often across RAF Hemswell as home base of 300 Squadron. How could that be explained? The RAF Ingham Heritage Group provided the answer to this conundrum: "The Squadron had been based at Hemswell up to the 18th of May 1942 and would remain at Ingham until the 31st of January 1943.... Hemswell being so close, it was probably still the 'parent station'. It is likely that the crew would have checked in there early on. The unit was of course to move back to Hemswell in January 1943. Thus, it makes sense that the crew would have had access to the (more permanent) facilities at Hemswell. Particularly given the primitive nature of Ingham (300 Sqn's aircraft were the first at Ingham!), which had only just officially opened as a station." Thus, RAF Ingham was a satellite base of RAF Hemswell and had only a minimum of support facilities for the airmen of 300 Squadron. The distance between both airbases is only about 12 kilometres, see also illustration 18. Conclusion must be that there was certainly a strong relationship between 300 Squadron and RAF Hemswell. This is an indication that the Wellington is likely to have been from 300 Squadron.

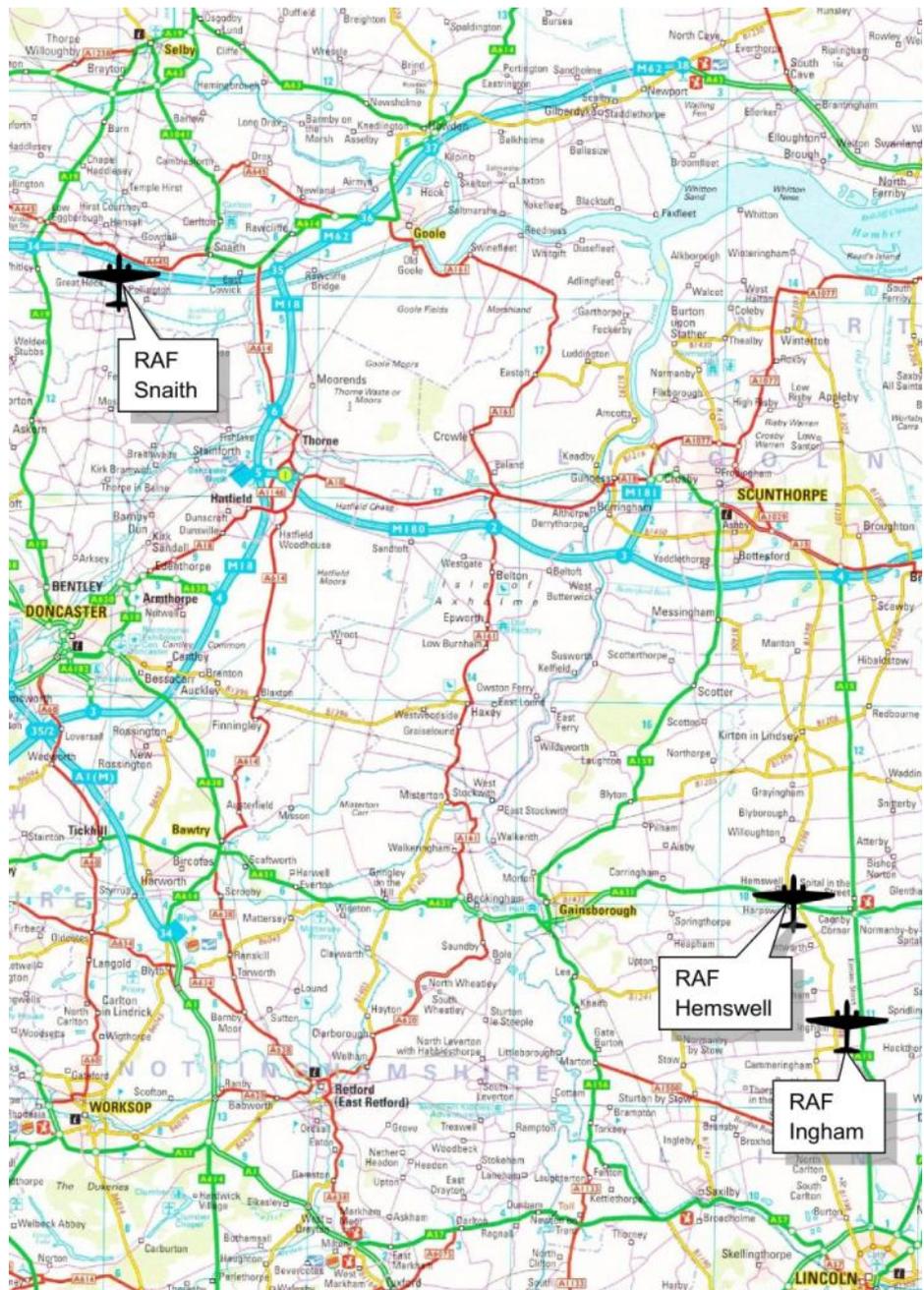


Illustration 18 – Location RAF Stations

Particularly given the primitive nature of Ingham (300 Sqn's aircraft were the first at Ingham!), which had only just officially opened as a station." Thus, RAF Ingham was a satellite base of RAF Hemswell and had only a minimum of support facilities for the airmen of 300 Squadron. The distance between both airbases is only about 12 kilometres, see also illustration 18. Conclusion must be that there was certainly a strong relationship between 300 Squadron and RAF Hemswell. This is an indication that the Wellington is likely to have been from 300 Squadron.

### Ration Card

The CWGC informed me that: "The Cigarette Ration Card was found on the body in 27.A.2". This means that the 'canteen pass' was found on the body of a sergeant, after all, on the headstone of grave 27A2 is written: "A Sergeant

Records of Service. At the MOD UK I requested the Records of Service for the five sergeants (four Polish and 1 British). I found the procedure somewhat bureaucratic and the fee of £30 per person somewhat high. Of course, every hobby costs money, but nearly €200 for five files is a lot of 'hobby money'.

RAF”. Also, the CWGC answered me: “No we do not possess this card. Artefacts were retained by the Air Ministry and not passed to the Commission. As far as we know, any such items were destroyed many years ago.”

Trying to get more insight in the matter of Ration Cards, the RAF Museum sent me an example, see illustration 19. It’s indeed an example from 1946, but the Museum informed me also that according to them, there was not much difference between Cards from 1946 and 1942. The example shows indeed the mentioning of the home base and the name of the holder. I thought then that it might be possible that the subject Ration Card might be in the sergeant’s personal file, or that the records show that such card was found on his body at the time of the reburial.



Illustration 19 – Front of a Ration Card of 1946.

Therefore, I have requested the personal records of the five sergeants (1 RAF Sgt from the X3552 and 4 Polish Sgts from the Z1475) from the MOD. Regrettably, no Ration Card was found, nor any mentioning about it in their records. The CWGC was right with their opinion that ‘such items’ were destroyed. However, the records did provide the following additional information:

- Sgt Eric Smith was posted on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1942 from a training unit to 150 Squadron on RAF Snaith. He did not serve with any other operational squadron and was never posted on RAF Hemswell.
- The four Polish sergeants (Bialy, Mielnik, Piatek and Szymen) were all four posted with 300 Squadron on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1942. In the records only ‘300 Squadron’ is noted, not RAF Hemswell or RAF Ingham.

I think that it can be concluded that there is a relationship between the found Ration Card on the body of the sergeant buried in grave 27A2 and 300 Squadron on RAF Ingham. On my part, an indication that the subject sergeant might have the Polish nationality. But, during my research something else cropped up, a bead crucifix!

### Bead crucifix

In November 2018 I received a reaction from the Air Historic Branch (RAF) of MOD UK and it said: “One of the bodies had a cigarette ration card ... and he was wearing a small bead crucifix.” This latter detail, ‘a small bead crucifix’, was new information for me. I have very little knowledge with regard to religious objects, but I understand that a ‘crucifix’ (see illustration 20 for an example)



is particularly an object that can be found in Roman Catholic circles. Therefore, it can strongly be argued that the subject sergeant was Roman Catholic. That religion was and is the most widespread religion in Poland. The records of service for the four Polish sergeants state that they were all 'R.C.', thus Roman Catholic. Therefore, all four might have carried that 'small bead crucifix'. The sergeant on board the British Wellington (other than Harrison), Eric Smith is not Roman Catholic<sup>10</sup>. The possibility that Eric Smith carried a crucifix is therefore negligible. The chance is much higher that the crucifix belonged to one of the Polish airmen and thus that the Wellington was Polish.

### **Luftwaffe aircraft, 17<sup>th</sup> October 1942**

The fact that two days after the crash a (small) Luftwaffe aircraft landed in the vicinity of the crash site seemed strange to me. Theo Boiten was able to tell me that such situation happened often and was mainly to investigate the claims of a Luftwaffe pilots of having shot down an enemy aircraft. The police report states: "Two high-ranked German officers saw that the crashed aircraft was not the aircraft they were looking for". That could mean that they were looking for another shot down Wellington, perhaps the X3552 of 150 Squadron. Thus, one of those 'high-ranking officers' could have been Hauptman Dr. Horst Patuschka, of NJG2 and who shot down a Wellington on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1942 in (German map reference) Planquadrat 32/15G3. That reference corresponds with a spot in the North Sea, approx. 40 kilometres west of Goeree-Overflakkee (a former island in south-west Holland).

Nachtjagdgeschwader 2 (NJG2) was a German night fighter wing stationed in autumn 1942 at the then Luftwaffe airbase Gilze and Rijen. Therefore, I searched for the Operational Records Book (Kriegstagebuch – KTB in German) of NJG2. Regrettably the entries for that period were not found in Luftwaffe records or in the Tradition Room of the current RNLAF airbase Gilze-Rijen. Theo Boiten was unable to help me further and it must be assumed that the KTB for October 1942 had become lost over time.

### **Conclusions**

There is no hard evidence to confirm the identity of the crashed Wellington to be the British X3552 or the Polish Z1475. However, there are a number of indications that serve to identify the aircraft and its crew. These indications are as follows:

- The Luftwaffe claim, as listed in the Nachtjagd Combat Archive van Theo Boiten, that Oblt Stefan Machat had shot down the Wellington Z1475 near Zevenbergen.
- The fact that the crashed Wellington had a crew of five and all were KIA. Four of them are buried in Bergen op Zoom and one is missing.
- The so-called 'strange signs', seen by military police officer Van der Mooren, and who are in all probability the Polish Airforce logo and the Polish text letters 'UWAGA NA ŚMIGŁO' (beware of the propeller).
- A Cigarette Ration Card, issued by the Sergeant's Mess of RAF Hemswell and found on the body of the sergeant in grave 27A2. That airbase provided supporting services and Mess facilities, acting as the 'Parent Station' of the Polish 300 Squadron.

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<sup>10</sup> The data field 'religion' in the service record of Eric Smith is blotted. Because of current (!) privacy regulations the MOD was unable to confirm the religion of Eric Smith. However, I was informed: "he was NOT Roman Catholic".

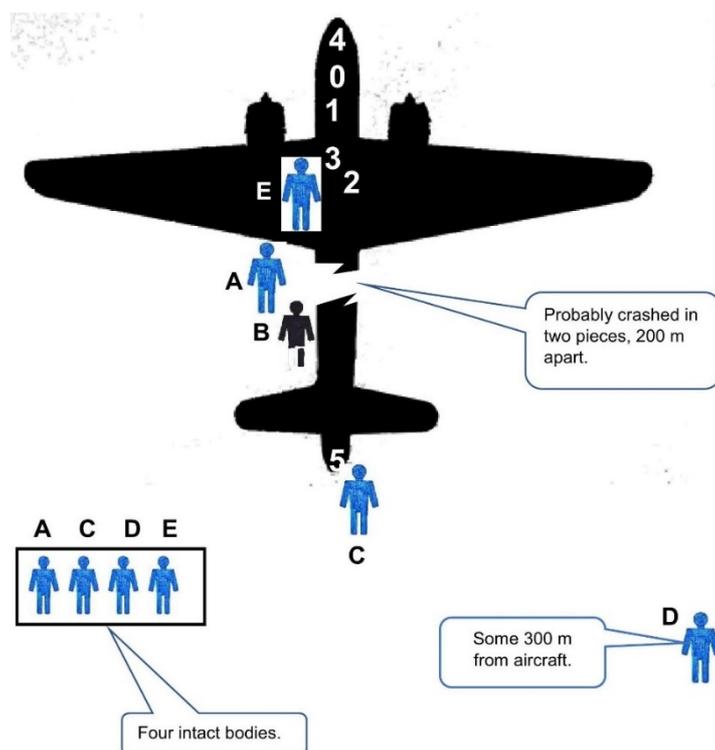
- A 'small bead crucifix' that would likely have belonged to a Roman Catholic sergeant. As the only English sergeant was not Roman Catholic, it is likely that the crucifix was owned by one of the Polish sergeants.

On the basis on the information in this report and the above-mentioned indications, it can be concluded, with some certainty, that the near Zevenbergen crashed Wellington was the Z1475 of the Polish 300 Squadron. Ultimately it can be said that the late Jos van Alphen and that Hans van Dordrecht were right in their final papers regarding the identity of the crashed Wellington.

It means that the four graves on the British War Cemetery in Bergen op Zoom contain four Polish airmen. Who is in which grave is without DNA research impossible to determine. Furthermore, next of kin would need to be contacted, which hasn't been done thus far. In pursuit of DNA research, I did again contact the CWGC and their reply (as expected) was that: "DNA testing will not be an option in these cases as it is the Commission's policy not to disturb remains buried in its cemeteries."

### Identification crew members Z1475

Still, I can't resist the temptation to try to get some insight in 'who is who'. See a schematic drawing of the crashed Wellington and its crew in illustration 21.



*Illustration 21 – Position of crew in and around crashed Wellington*

The position 0 is that of the bomb-aimer and normally be carried out by the navigator Sobolewski. However, on the return flight that role was of no importance. Position 1 is of the pilot, Szymen. Position 2 is the navigator Sobolewski and position 3 is of the Wireless Operator Piatek. Numbers 4 and 5 are the positions of respectively the Front Air Gunner and the Rear Air Gunner. Those two positions were held by Bialy and Mielnik. Which of the two was occupying which Air Gunner position is unknown.

Police officer Van Gorp had seen the bodies A, B, C and D in the neighbourhood of the aircraft wreckage. It is assumed that the Germans, in the early hours of 16<sup>th</sup> October, discovered body E in the (nose section of the) aircraft. That morning, when the bodies were transported to Zevenbergen, the bodies A, C, D and E were neatly arranged in a row, as eyewitness Leen Boot had explained. About body B (an almost entirely charred torso, with a leg and intestines nearby) nothing is known. Who is who remains a mystery.

On the next page, in illustration 22, are the pictures of the crew of the Polish Wellington Z1475. The Dutch owe their freedom also to these five airmen.



*Illustration 22 – The five killed Polish airmen*

### **Where did the X3552 crash?**

What remains, is the British Wellington X3552. In the Air War Bulletin of December 2007, it was suggested that the aircraft was fired upon whilst approaching the Dutch coast and that two men jumped from the aircraft, thinking that they were above land. The Wellington then turned eastward and was fired upon again and as result crashed near Zevenbergen at about 11:15 p.m. In the archive of Henk Welting that possibility is mentioned and “most probably Harrison and Maxfield left the aircraft and landed in the waterway Hollandsch Diep, and subsequently drowned, their bodies drifting off to the North Sea”. In addition, there is also information in the NCA, that the X3552 crashed in sea, about 35 to 40 kilometres west of Goeree-Overflakkee; possibly shot down by Hauptman Dr. Horst Patuschka.

The following facts are that Harrison – was washed-up on 23 November 1942 at the Noordstrand (North Beach) in Scheveningen and that Maxfield was found in the

Waddenzee (Wadden Sea) on 2 December 1942. This means that between the date of the crash and the washing-up of Harrison's body, a period of about six weeks had elapsed. Maxfield was found one week later and thus seven weeks after the crash.

We end up with two scenarios. The first one is that Harrison and Maxfield landed in the waterway Hollandsch Diep (or the Haringvliet, a little downstream) and secondly that they were washed out of the Wellington when the aircraft came down in the North Sea. At those two scenarios the following questions can be asked:

- Regarding the first scenario the question is if a body of an airman, fully clothed, landed and he drowned in the Hollandsch Diep or Haringvliet, it would take 6 respectively 7 weeks for that body to wash out of these waterways, between Moerdijk and the coast line Goeree-Overflakkee and Voorne-Putten, before the body might be found near Scheveningen resp. in the Waddenzee.
- Regarding the second scenario the question is based on the thought that the Wellington crashed west of Goeree-Overflakkee. It could be that Harrison and Maxfield, jumped out before the aircraft crashed in the sea and drowned. It is also possible that their bodies were later washed out of the aircraft when the plane was already on the sea bed. Furthermore, it is somewhat peculiar that Harrison (the navigator) and Maxfield (the bomb aimer) both jumped or were washed out the aircraft, because both were positioned in the fuselage between the wings. It is also of course, possible that the aircraft broke into pieces and that both airmen were engulfed in seawater. Question that remains is whether a body will drift over a period of 6 or 7 weeks from the (likely) crash location to the Dutch coast.

To investigate if either of these two scenarios could be relevant, the Hydrographic Service of the Royal Netherlands Navy in The Hague was contacted. The sea currents, as they would have occurred in October 1942, were looked at. A map of that period was not readily available, but a map of 1951 was, see illustration 23 for the time '3 hours after high tide in Hook of Holland'. The differences between 1951 and 1942 are seen as minimal. To ascertain if either of the scenarios are relevant, quite a number of maps with the different time intervals would have to be studied; a task that nowadays hardly can be done with 'paper and pencil', one would need a computer.

That is the reason that the Royal Dutch Navy has sent both scenarios to Rijkswaterstaat, the executive agency of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, dedicated to promote safety, mobility and the quality of life in the Netherlands. The Hydrographic Meteorological Centre (HMC) of Rijkswaterstaat use computer programmes whereby the movement of objects in water can be simulated. Sea currents in specific seasons and tides are taken into account. Regrettably, HMC did not have the required data available in time for finalisation of this report. A justification for both scenarios could therefore not (yet) be formulated. It is possible that the results will become available later in 2019. If necessary, a revised report will be distributed. It remains for the time being unknown as to where Harrison and Maxfield landed in which water.



Illustration 23 – Sea currents chart Zuid-Holland and Zeeland, 1951.

Also, I contacted the website [www.zzairwar.nl](http://www.zzairwar.nl). This organisation researches and documents the hundreds of Allied aircraft lost during 1939-1945 over Holland's IJsselmeer (the former Zuyder Sea) when on bombing missions in Germany during WW2. Their reaction to my question was: "It is difficult, nearly impossible for a drifting object in the Haringvliet to drift to the coast line, 'around' Hook of Holland, past The Hague and to get, say somewhere, near Noordwijk. Let alone to the Wadden Sea. The tides and the sea currents push at the end of the Haringvliet too much against the coast. If Harrison had landed in the Haringvliet, he would have been found much earlier along the drift route. The date of 23 November points to a different crash location than Zevenbergen. The location in the Wadden Sea where Maxfield was found, points to a crash location much more to the west in the North Sea. The notion of a crash location for X3552 35 to 40 km west of Goeree is consistent with the wash-up location of Harrison and the spot where Maxfield was found and therefore the most probable crash location of the British Wellington".

Based on the above information, I conclude with some caution that the Wellington X3552 crashed in the North Sea, some 35-40 kilometres west from (the former

island) Goeree-Overflakkee. Two airmen were later washed-up on the Dutch coast, and they were identified as Sgt Harrison and P/O Maxfield and buried on Dutch soil. The fate of the other four crew members is unknown, but it is not impossible that one or more later washed-up as well on the Dutch coast and buried as an unknown airman in a local Dutch cemetery.

The internet was searched for pictures of the X3552 crew. Regrettably only of P/O Maxfield a picture was found, see illustration 24.



*Illustration 24 – P/O Frederick Maxfield*

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings in this report, certain registrations should be corrected or modified. Separately, I have requested the database manager for the SGLO Online Loss Register to make changes to the Loss Charts of both Wellingtons. That is T1882 for the British Wellington X3552 and T1882A for the Polish Wellington Z1475. On the internet are also other websites with information about the crashes of both Wellingtons. I will propose changes to their records in due course. If those registrations will be modified is at their discretion. I would appreciate it if the CWGC would consider modifying the inscriptions on the subject headstones in Bergen op Zoom, but I will of course understand if this doesn't happen in the near future

### **Final remarks**

Reactions? Yes please! It is quite possible that I have misinterpreted some data in this report. If a reader wants to contact me about this report, please send an e-mail to [willemvandranen@ziggo.nl](mailto:willemvandranen@ziggo.nl).

About the author. Willem van Dranen was born in 1942 in Rotterdam and after his secondary school abroad, he was conscripted for national service with the Royal Netherlands Air Force (RNLAf) in 1962. After the compulsory two years he volunteered to stay as a regular communications officer and retired from the Air Force in 1997. During his career he had postings on many RNLAf stations in the Netherlands and in NATO Headquarters in Germany and Belgium. From 1997 till 2005 he was Chairman Command & Control Technology Platform within the Netherlands Industries for Defence & Security (NIDV) in The Hague. Thereafter he was a freelance consultant in the area of Defence Information Technology for a number of years.

In 2009 he was confronted with historical data on WW2 aircraft crashes in his region. As some texts of pictures was not correct or clear enough, he volunteered to check those texts. Via this route he got involved with the documentation of aircraft crashes in the northwest corner of the province of North-Brabant, Holland. In the region about 60 aircraft crashed or crash-landed during WW2 and many of those crashes still require further investigation.

Acknowledgements. This report could only be written with the support of many persons, in The Netherlands and from abroad. I am very grateful for all the contributions and comments provided over the last 18 months or so. A special thanks is for John Rennison, a retired air force colleague, who corrected this English version of the report.

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- 24 – P/O Frederick Maxfield, <http://yorkshire-aircraft.co.uk/aircraft/yorkshire/york42/z1671.html>