

## **September 11, a Tower and a Plane...**

More than 80 years ago, on the night of September 10 to 11, 1942, a significant air raid was carried out on the German city of Düsseldorf by the British Royal Air Force with 479 aircrafts. Amongst the 242 Vickers Wellington aircrafts that took part in the attack was an aircraft with registration number T2606 and code JS-Y—a British crew led by an Australian pilot, Sergeant David G. Oxenham. When the plane flew over Gouda on its way back to England, it came under fire and was hit by a German ME-110 night fighter, resulting in a fire. The plane quickly lost altitude, and the crew could no longer safely exit the aircraft by parachute. Oxenham realized that reaching the British Canal was not feasible and opted for an emergency landing, avoiding the residential area of Bleiswijk. A village resident saw the aircraft skim close to the tower a Church and make an emergency landing in the land of Farmer Bos on the Overbuurtseweg. Despite everything, the five-man crew managed to leave the aircraft alive. After their capture, they all ended up in German prisoner-of-war camps.

## **Forty-Three Years later**

Leo Bolleboom of Berkel en Rodenrijs, who had spent years researching WW2 events in his region, was busy preparing a book for the May 5th Liberation Day celebrations. "I was Born Again" in the 1980s, he said. His fascination with WW2 air warfare was particularly strong. That is how he found David Oxenham while searching the aircraft crew that had crashed in Bleiswijk in 1942.

After extensive research, correspondence led to the pilot David Oxenham being contacted and invited to Bleiswijk in 1985 and again in 1986. All the town and the then-mayor welcomed Oxenham as a hero, and he was honoured for his bravery.

During his visits, David Oxenham not only explored the crash landing site but also formed lasting friendships in Bleiswijk. Leo Bolleboom, in his role as a chronicler, meticulously documented these interactions in an album filled with correspondence, photos, and other mementos. His book, was later donated to the *Oudheidkundige Vereniging en Museum Bleiswijk*, ensuring that these memories would be preserved for future generations.

## **A 'Crash' that led to a 'Crush'**

The family with whom Oxenham stayed as a guest during his first stay and the family of Leo Bolleboom came into regular contact through Oxenham's visit. The children in both families got to know each other, and at a certain point, a spark flew between the young man from Bleiswijk and the young lady from Berkel. Soon, there was a courtship, and a few years later a wedding was the result of the acquaintance. Oxenham was proud to hear that he had played a part in this love story!

## **Another Forty years on...**

Over the years, the children and grandchildren of Oxenham had heard various stories about their father and grandfather. Granddaughter Susan wanted to know more about his past. She hoped that one day she would have the opportunity to visit the village of Bleiswijk and see with her own eyes the area in which her grandfather's crash took place.

That opportunity presented itself when her husband, Tim, had to be in the Netherlands for business. Tim's Dutch contact, Harm Theunisse, looked for a contact in Bleiswijk for Susan and Tim.

Harm contacted Depot's 40-'45 museum of Stijn Molleman, and Stijn and Harm quickly made plans via WhatsApp to make Susan's wish come true.

In the plot, Stijn involved Andreas, the owner of *Collectie Honger naar Bevrijding* (Hunger for the Liberation Collection). In addition, photographer Ariane Kok and Leon Erwich, Chairman of the Bleiswijk Oranjecomite, were involved in the organisation. Vivien Erwich, being English, was able to ensure that Susan and Tim, who live in America, could communicate well with the two most special guests of that day: Bleiswijk's honorary citizen Cor de Ruijter and chronicler Leo Bolleboom himself, both of whom Susan's grandfather David Oxenham had met in the eighties and the reason for his visits to Bleiswijk.

## **A Wonderful Afternoon**

Saturday, April 20, was the day. After gathering in Ariane's photo studio (opposite Bleswijks War Memorial and Church that was once almost hit by Oxenham's plane), the group had lunch at VinoTé, a few dozen metres away.

After a pleasant lunch and exchange of anecdotes, the group walked through the village to Stijn's museum on the Rembrandtlaan, where Leo Bolleboom's book was on display. For Susan and Tim, having the book shown by Leo Bolleboom himself and all present was an extraordinary moment with emotions running freely. Finally, after a short trip by car, the group visited the crash site. An Australian flag was placed, and Susan laid flowers in memory of her grandfather's landing. After this short but emotional afternoon, Susan, Tim, and Harm said farewell but not goodbye, as the couple hope to return with their children next year. Who knows what might happen next?

<https://www.studioarianekok.nl/>

<https://museum-depot-40-45.jimdosite.com/>

<https://hongernaarbevrijding.jimdofree.com/>