

# Bombing mission ended in disaster



Lynda Paul finally stood at her uncle's grave in Westergeest, the Netherlands on May 5, 2003, on the 60th anniversary of his death. Photo courtesy of Lynda Paul

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children. In search of employment, he moved to Acton in 1938 after finishing high school, to live with his oldest sister, Lena Mann who was 16 years older than him. Lena had virtually raised Kenneth as a child and she gladly welcomed him into her home, to live with her husband Alex, and their two young children, Kenneth and Lynda. Soon after, Buck was hired at the Beardmore Tannery.

When war broke out in 1939, Buck enlisted, the youngest of a long line of servicemen in the Buck family.

After being stationed in England in 1941, Kenneth was transferred to bomber command at 19 years of age. Within the next year, he met and fell in love with Dorothy Watkins of Exeter, Devonshire.

The two were married a scant six weeks before the May 5 mission.

Shortly after midnight, the bomber formation flew over northern Friesland in the Netherlands. Flying by, they were picked up on radar at the German air base at Leeuwarden. A squadron of German Messerschmitt 109 fighter planes were scrambled to deal with the approaching bombers.

Veteran Luftwaffe pilot Lt. Robert Denzel was in the cockpit of one of those Messerschmitts as the Halifax bombers flew into

range. Using textbook German air tactics, Denzel targeted one of the less maneuverable bombers and fell in behind and below it, out of the pilot and crew's view.

It was Buck's plane.

Eyewitness accounts tell of the Messerschmitt opening fire on the Halifax. The bomber corkscrewed down to the ground in a ball of flames, and crashed in the field of Bunte Hun, near the village of Westergeest.

It was 12:30 a.m. on the 5th of May, 1943— there were no survivors.

Ironically, Luftwaffe records show that Lt. Denzel made the supreme sacrifice himself soon after. He was killed in an aerial battle about six weeks later, June 25, 1943.

At the time, the Dutch resistance was quite active in the Westergeest area. The basement of a nearby farmhouse was regularly used as a safe house for escaping Jews or local German men trying to avoid being taken back to Germany to serve with the Nazis.

When the Halifax hit the ground near the farmhouse, several German men were hiding in that basement. Upon hearing the explosion, they were certain the Nazis were coming to get them.

Only two crew members' bodies were retrieved from the crash site in the early morning

hours by local villager Luit Klaver. Buck was one of the casualties, and the other was the tail gunner, 32-year-old Sgt. George Rose.

The front section of the bomber was buried deep in the ground, and with it, more of the five other crewmen.

Weeks later, another crewman's body was found by a fisherman, floating in a nearby lake. The fisherman was wanted by the Nazis, so he didn't notify the authorities, and the body was never retrieved.

The bodies of Buck and Rose were taken to nearby Kollum for a few days, while the Nazis checked them for any information, then they were returned to Westergeest to be buried in the local church cemetery.

May 10, 1943, Kenneth's sister Lena Mann received a telegram at her Acton home from her brother Austin, (a Spitfire pilot with the RAF), informing her that their youngest brother, was officially 'missing in action'. For some unknown reason, it would take until September 1944 before she and Ken's widow Dorothy received written confirmation that Kenneth was indeed dead, and that he was buried in Westergeest.

In spite of the confirmation, Lena refused to believe it was her brother Ken that occupied that grave, and clung to the hope

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## FOR THE FALLEN

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

(Laurence Binyon, 1869-1943)

*Remembrance Day, November 11th, a time for Canadians to remember the men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom and peace during two World Wars, the Korean War, and United Nations Peacekeeping Missions. Let us remember and honour them by attending this weekend's Remembrance Day Services in Acton, Georgetown and Glen Williams.*

**Mayor Kathy Gastle and Members of Council**