

Niece of tail gunner killed in action meets funeral mourner— 60 years later

An *Independent & Free Press* story on a Georgetown woman's quest to locate the grave of her uncle killed during the Second World War, has led the woman to a Dutch native who attended the airman's funeral in 1943.

Last year, Lynda Paul of Georgetown told her story of her years of research to locate the grave of her uncle, Flight Sergeant Kenneth Howard Buck, who was shot down May 4, 1943 over the village of Westergeest, in the Netherlands.

After years of researching, Paul was connected via e-mail to a school teacher in Westergeest, who had a personal interest in educating his students about the sacrifices of the Canadian soldiers in Holland, and also in making sure their graves were preserved with reverence.

As a result, Paul visited the cemetery while on the *Keeping the Memory Alive* tour of Holland, hosted by Tom Schenk and Martin Boomsma of Georgetown.

During the trip, Paul was finally able to visit the final resting place of her uncle, and to lay a wreath on his grave in his honour.

She said it gave her closure.

When the story ran in last year's Remembrance Day special section in *The Independent & Free Press*, Paul figured it was the end of the story.

She was wrong.

Following publication of the story, Paul and her husband Bob returned from a day trip to find a note attached to their front door.

It was from Wim and Art Meerstra, a Dutch couple who live in Durham near Walkerton. They had been in Georgetown visiting their daughter.

While here, they had read Lynda's story.

"I was so surprised," said Paul, "The note said that Wim attended my uncle's funeral in May of 1943. She had been one of the group of girls who acted as mourners and laid flowers on the grave."

Paul immediately called them at their home, and set up a meeting.

Since last year, a warm friendship with the Meerstras has developed and Paul learned more about her uncle's death from Wim.

In May of 1943, Wim was 14-years-old. The Germans had imposed a curfew so everyone was forced to remain in their house during the evening hours. Every night around 9 p.m. Wim and her family would hear the sound of Allied bombers flying, heading out to bomb Germany and later returning.

About 12:30 a.m. May 5, they heard a roar



Through last year's story in *The Independent & Free Press* about her search for her dead uncle's grave in the Netherlands, Lynda Paul (centre) met with Wim and Art Meerstra. Wim was present at Paul's uncle's funeral in May of 1943. Photo courtesy of Lynda Paul

followed by an explosion. They ran outside in spite of the curfew.

There was debris flying and they saw a plane in the field. German soldiers surrounded the crash site and started to shoot to keep people away.

Although there were no survivors, they wouldn't let anyone close to the crash.

Wim and other children attended the funeral of the only two soldiers recovered from the crash of the Halifax bomber. The two airmen were George Rose, a British RAF tail gunner and Kenneth Buck, Lynda's uncle, a Canadian RCAF tail gunner flying with the RAF. The funeral took place in the churchyard of the church in Westergeest.

"When I showed Wim a picture that I had, showing the Germans with their rifles at the funeral, it brought back bad memories to her," said Paul, "Wim said the newspapers reported they were buried with full honours but it brought no comfort that the Germans were there with their guns."

For years after, Wim and a group of girls placed flowers on Kenneth Buck's grave.

She later married Art Meerstra in the church beside the graveyard and the couple came to Canada in 1951 and settled in Durham where they live today.

When Paul set out on her quest to learn about her uncle, she admits she had moments when she wondered how successful she would be.

But with a lot of determined research and some incredible coincidences, she has learned more about F/Sgt. Kenneth Buck than she ever imagined possible.

—By Ted Brown, staff writer

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Monetary donations towards the purchase of the items listed requiring a tax receipt may be dropped off at Georgetown Christian Fellowship payable to: GCF - Haiti Fund.

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