

The last deed of Pilot Officer John L. Wilson, RAF 183585, fallen on September 19th 1944 during the battle of Arnhem.

Undersigned, Herman A. Roell, born 29 Nov. 1925 in Brunoy, France, having the Dutch nationality, nowadays living in 23 Via Castello, 21020 Luvinata (VA)-Italy, phone 0332-227935, declares:

.That during the war he and his family (mother, 3 brothers and 2 sisters) lived at the "Bornshoeve", Bakenbergse weg(road) 286, in the northern periphery of ARNHEM (see annex, map: blue coloured plot).

.That in the morning of the third day of the battle of Arnhem September the 19th, a German anti-aircraft unit took position along the Bakenbergse weg under the tree's (4 pieces 20 mm. guns about 30 yards separated from each other, facing West - S/W), and along an afforest lane perpendicular to the Bakenbergse weg (at least one piece 88 mm. gun, facing West - N/W), all within 500 yards of the "Bornshoeve", closing at the same time the street for any traffic (see annex, map: green coloured angle).

.That afterwards a German military entered the "Bornshoeve", ordering undersigned and his family to stay indoors, preferable in the cellar, as soon some heavy shooting could be expected (giving the strong impression that they were well informed about the forthcoming event, preparing a trap).

.That in the afternoon Dakota's C-47 and Stirlings parachuted supplies West of the Bakenbergse weg in the open fields/meadows as far as up to the road and even over it, exactly in front of the German anti-aircraft positions, thus meeting a concentrated fire (deafening, in the house of undersigned).

.That a German military entered during the action (there were more, who walked in and out during the action), telling undersigned and family that a plane was shot down and a house burning, **the plane having a very brave pilot, that he tried to crash on one of the gunbatteries with his plane, but that he just failed.**

.That this plane, a Dakota C-47, had cut the treetops immediately above one of the 20 mm. gun-positions (at about 5 yards distance from the ground), crashing immediately behind the Bakenbergse road, raising fire in a nearby house (see annex, map: red spot 1).

.That according to the "Roll of Honour" compiled by mr J.A. Hey and published in 1986, this plane was flown by Pilot Officer John L. Wilson, with F/Sgt Herbert Osborne as co-pilot (of 271 Sqdn, base Down Ampney).

.That undersigned and his brother W. Eric Roell(nowadays living in the United States, 2732 34th Street N.W. , Washington DC, phone 202-3388623, employee at the Worldbank) buried the fallen members of the crew; two were lying near each other on an open plot of ground about 10 yards ahead of the plane-remnants (thrown out forward during the crash, most probably pilot and co-pilot), and a third member also ahead on the open plot, but very near the plane-remnants. A fourth person could not be buried, being entangled in the planewreck (a despatcher RASC, according to the information of "Roll of Honour", still to be identified).

.That another Dakota C-47 was hit during this resupply mission, (flown by F/Lt Charles R. Slack, of 575 Sqdn, base Broadwell), crashing about 1.100 yards more to the east(see annex, map: red spot 2), flying same (?) altitude.

.That undersigned, not living anymore in the Netherlands, was contacted after a long search by mr Tiemens in 1982, while investigating the case of an unknown RASC despatcher, who on the same day jumped by parachute out of an aeroplane and was killed upon landing near the "Bornshoeve".

.That undersigned received a.o. information that the plane, which had crashed at the Bakenbergse weg, was the C-47 flown by David S.A. Lord, who was posthumously awarded the Victoria-cross.

.That this information to undersigned was very satisfactory, indicating that the last action of the pilot of the crashed plane apparently had been recorded, and being also a confirmation of what was told to the family by the German military.

.That after some time undersigned received new information: the name of the pilot of the crashed plane at the Bakenbergse weg was not Lord but Wilson, this also confirmed by the fact that recently the weddingring of Wilson was found at the crash-place and send to the widow.

.That this information fitted with undersigned and his brother's perception during the burial of (in their opinion) the pilot and co-pilot, one of them having a (wedding)ring which they did not remove, to facilitate the identification by official authority after the war (unfortunately the ring was lost, for a long period).

.That a tragic confoundation of persons was feared by undersigned, as at that time the crash-place of the plane of Slack (see annex, map: red point 2) was thought to be the one of Lord.

.That it thus seemed better to leave things as they were.

.That however with the publication of the "Roll of Honour" undersigned could take notice of the deeds of David S.A. Lord, which can not be confounded with Wilson, David Lord's plane having crashed 3,5 miles to the west (see annex, map: red point 3).

.That this account is meant for and presented with due respect to the Royal Air Force Authority for evaluation.

.That this account is made available after an extremely long period from the event itself, but also that hardly any possibility existed for undersigned to do earlier untill receiving the information of "Roll of Honour".

.That undersigned is fully available for giving further information or clarification, in Holland, U.K. or Italy.

.That members of his family, who have not been informed by undersigned about this declaration (also not intended in the future), can be interviewed to cross-check the contents (at least one family member, next to undersigned, was present during the statement of the German military, it could be more or all members, but that is quite impossible to remember).

U.R. Jan. 1988

Landing & Dropzones Arnhem, September 1944

Crashlocations Dakota's, Sept. 19th

- 1) FZ 626 - P/O Wilson, 271 Sqdn
- 2) KG 388 - F/Lt Slack, 575 Sqdn
- 3) KG 374 - F/Lt Lord VC, 271 Sqdn
- 4) KG 428 - P/O Christie, 48 Sqdn

