

# **The Story of Alfred Edward Kitchen and Maurice Williamson and their De Havilland Mosquito B Mk.XVI - ML 979 - HS-A**

By Gert Talens, Dronten, 2019-2024

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## **Preface**

In this publication, you will find the story of my search for what happened on the night of November 27, 1944, to Alfred Edward Kitchen and Maurice Williamson, and their De Havilland Mosquito B Mk.XVI - ML 979 - HS-A. It is a gripping and impressive story.

During my research and writing, I used many sources, which are referenced in the footnotes. Although I have tried to be as accurate as possible, and consulted as many knowledgeable people as I could through conversations, emails, and phone calls, in order to create a complete account, it is still possible that I may have missed or misinterpreted something. For that reason, in June 2019, I sent a first version of the story to many involved, asking for feedback. Where feedback was provided, it was checked and possibly integrated into the story. Despite this, it is still possible that there are omissions. If so, I would be very grateful to receive this information so that I can incorporate it into the story.

As with historical writing, time can sometimes blur facts, but new research methods and opportunities allow for new insights and revised narratives. My story is an attempt to do so.

If you wish to cite or publish parts of my work, it is permitted to do so with my permission and of course with proper source acknowledgment. For photos, permission from the Kitchen and Williamson families is needed, and I ask that you inform me if you intend to use any photos.

The history of Kitchen and Williamson has deeply affected me. I hope this will be evident in the story that follows.

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## A New Story

In the fall of 2014, the "Stichting Projecten Rondom het Greppelveld" (Foundation for Projects Around the Greppelveld), through Mrs. Annie Haverkort from Dronten, contacted me. The foundation was busy reorganizing a small forest called Torenbosje, located on the N309 between Dronten and Elburg, near the Oudebosweg exit. The aim was to make this forest more accessible, creating a resting point for cyclists and walkers, with an information board and artwork. For the opening, which was scheduled for June 2015, the foundation wanted a story written and told about this place. They asked if I could and would provide this. It was an interesting request, but before agreeing, I asked why it was called Torenbosje. The answer was, "Because oil drilling was once done here. There used to be a drilling tower."

This was entirely new information to me, so I asked further. I was told that oil was drilled for in the 1960s, but no oil was found, so the drilling tower was quickly dismantled. My imagination began to stir. They drilled for oil, but found nothing? Not an interesting story. But what if they did find oil, but for a reason kept secret, the drilling tower was quickly dismantled! A story began to unfold in my mind.

On June 27, 2015, Torenbosje was officially opened, and I told my written story "The Secret of the Torenbosje" to many visitors, including the King's Commissioner, Leen Verbeek, and Mayor Aat de Jonge. It was an unlikely tale, blending fiction with fact. Facts like how in 1965, the American company Continental Oil Company (Conoco) drilled for oil, but after disappointing results, the temporary drilling tower was dismantled. There were also facts about a dramatic event in the fall of 1944: an English De Havilland Mosquito crashed with two crew members aboard. Parts of the aircraft were found during the polder reclamation near the Torenbosje. In that crash, the English airman Alfred Kitchen died. Kitchen was the navigator of the plane. The pilot, Maurice Williamson, managed to escape using his parachute but was soon captured after landing safely.

My story was well received. People listened attentively and talked about it afterward. However, while cycling home that evening, doubt crept in. In my story, I mentioned Alfred Kitchen, who died on the night of November 27-28, 1944. His death plays an important role

in the story. But is it fair to mention him? What if some of his family were still alive? What would they think of it?

Once home, I knew what I had to do. I had to find the real story of Kitchen and Williamson, and what really happened to their plane. A search that I could never have imagined would result in such an incredible story. A story that came to life thanks to the help of the Kitchen and Williamson families, living in the United Kingdom.

## **The Beginning of the Search**

Imagine that somewhere in England, there might still be relatives of the airmen Kitchen and Williamson! With this thought in mind, I cycled home on June 27, 2015. And if these relatives existed, how could I find out where they lived?

My only lead at that time was the text on memorial post number 2 of the crash route at Torenbosje. In the Netherlands, there are various memorial posts, each telling a short story of what happened at that location. Some of these posts are in Flevoland. On post 2, located at Torenbosje, information about the aircraft type (De Havilland Mosquito, ML 979, B Mk XVI), the squadron it belonged to (109 RAF), and the airfield it departed from (Little Staughton in Bedfordshire) is provided. The names of the two crew members are also listed.

Using Google, I visited several sites and quickly discovered that Kitchen came from Letchmore Heath in Hertfordshire. Kitchen was 24 years old when he died on November 27-28, 1944, and was married to Edna Kitchen. Kitchen's flight was reported missing on November 27, 1944. The aircraft they flew was part of a group of planes on a bombing mission over Neuss in the Ruhr area, Germany. Williamson survived the crash and became a prisoner of war. However, I could not find Williamson's place of residence. Interestingly, post number 2 on the memorial mentioned that the aircraft was flying in German colors.

Multiple websites provided a lot of information, but some of it was conflicting. The search for the families hit a dead end. No addresses were found, and there were no clear indications

that Kitchen's family was still alive. As for Williamson, through the website Mossie.org, I found out there was family, but it was unclear where they lived.

## **The Kitchen Family Lives!**

Then came a breakthrough. Through Facebook, I searched for "Letchmore Heath" and found a page for a local pub called The Three Horseshoes. I made a post, and within three hours of my inquiry, a response came from someone named Susan Moore. She informed me that the deceased airman Alfred Kitchen had a son named Adrian, who was still alive, and that Kitchen's wife, Edna, was also still alive. Both lived in Letchmore Heath. Through Susan Moore, I was put in touch with Simon Kitchen, who was the family's contact person.

With this fantastic new information, things moved quickly. Simon Kitchen and I exchanged information via email. It turned out that Edna had remarried in 1949 to Benjamin Kitchen, Alfred's youngest brother. From this marriage, a son was born: Simon. This clarified that Adrian and Simon were half-brothers, with the same mother (Edna) but different fathers (Alfred and Benjamin), who were brothers.

Via email, various attachments were sent, including photos of Alfred, Alfred and Edna together, and written documents about the flight and the recovery of Kitchen's body. The most significant of these documents was a written eyewitness account titled *Sunset*. This report was written in 1992 by Kampen resident Jan Westerink. Westerink had been in contact with the Kitchen family in the 1990s and was an important source for the family in understanding what happened to Alfred Kitchen. In the report, Westerink wrote to the family that he had been involved in the recovery of Kitchen's body on March 4, 1945. He described how the wreckage of Kitchen's plane was located near a place called Zeebeumpie, with the coordinates: N52°33'43.8", E5°50'40.5". Westerink included a map of the area in his description (Westerink, 1992).

The Zeebeumpie was a tree near the former Zuiderzee and IJsselmeer coast, well-known to older residents of Kampen. It was a spot where people swam, fished, roamed, and walked before, during, and after the war. The wreckage lay several hundred meters offshore. This

source revealed that Kitchen's body was not immediately recovered from the wreck after the crash in November 1944. It was only after the ice on the IJsselmeer melted in March 1945 that the body was retrieved, with one of Kitchen's legs remaining trapped in the wreckage.

What stood out about this description was that it contradicted the information on memorial post number 2 at Torenbosje. Although the post stated that the plane had crashed near Torenbosje, Westerink's account indicated otherwise.

Because there were several conflicting details, and more questions arose as time went on, I arranged to visit Simon Kitchen in Letchmore Heath, England. On November 4, 2016, I traveled with my eldest son Erik to England to meet the Kitchen family. Sadly, I learned that Edna Kitchen had passed away earlier that spring.

### **My Meeting with the Kitchen Family**

On the evening of November 4, 2016, my son Erik and I arrived at St. Albans station after flying into London Luton Airport. At around 9:00 PM, we met Simon Kitchen, who greeted us warmly with a handshake and a laugh. Simon took us to a hotel in St. Albans, and we agreed to meet the next morning at 8:00 AM for a day filled with visits to significant places in Alfred Kitchen's life.

Meeting a relative of an airman I had read and heard so much about made a big impression on me. Standing before me was a family member of the pilot I had been researching. What should I ask him and his half-brother Adrian? Would they appreciate my curiosity? How would Adrian feel about my mentioning his father in my story, *The Secret of Torenbosje*? Would it be painful for them? Was I dredging up things they preferred to leave in the past? That night, I slept restlessly.

## **November 5, 2016: Little Staughton Airfield**

The next morning, Simon Kitchen arrived with his son, Dani le. We got in their car and drove to the location where the Little Staughton airfield had been during the war. The runway and some buildings were still there, including an old control tower used by the military as barracks, workshops, and storage.

This airfield was built in 1941, initially belonging to the United States Army Air Forces from 1942 until March 1944. It was then used by the British Royal Air Force. From April 1944 to April 1945, it was home to the 109th RAF Squadron, to which Alfred Kitchen belonged. The airfield was operational until 1947.

It was a remarkable feeling to walk around this place. It was from this airfield that Kitchen and Williamson's plane took off. It was to be Kitchen's last flight.

## **The Visit to All Saints Church**

After visiting Little Staughton, we went to the All Saints Church in Little Staughton. In this church, Alfred Kitchen's name is inscribed in the memorial book for military personnel who fell during the First and Second World Wars.

## **The De Havilland Aircraft Museum**

After the church visit, we continued our journey to the De Havilland Aircraft Museum in Shenley. This museum housed a De Havilland Mosquito, very similar to the one in which Kitchen had flown. It was an impressive aircraft, and what stood out was that it was made of wood, making it extremely lightweight. It was equipped with two powerful Rolls Royce engines, could fly at an altitude of about 12 km, had a wingspan of approximately 16 meters, a maximum speed of 667 km/h, and a range of 3,200 km.

## Meeting Adrian Kitchen, Alfred's Son

After visiting the De Havilland Museum, we headed towards Radlett. There, I faced the most exciting part of my trip to England: meeting Adrian Kitchen, Alfred's son. We had arranged to meet in the local pub, The Three Horseshoes, the same pub through which I had first come into contact with the Kitchen family. After finding a spot in the small pub and chatting a bit, the door suddenly opened, and a small, slightly frail man walked in. It was immediately clear to me that this was Adrian. He greeted me warmly and shook my hand. We ordered and enjoyed a delicious pie together.

During lunch, Adrian spoke about his childhood. He was born in January 1945, two months after his father died. Although he had felt the sadness of his father's death, he also said that he considered Benjamin his father. Benjamin, Alfred's younger brother, had married Alfred's widow Edna on February 3, 1949. The then 5-year-old Adrian gained a "new" father through this marriage, and he cherished warm memories of Benjamin—memories he did not have of his biological father.

I noticed that Adrian was not reluctant to speak about his biological father and that it was not painful for him. This gave me the confidence to finally tell him about my search and ask how he felt about me using his father, Alfred, in my story *The Secret of Torenbosje*. His response was, "I think that is really wonderful." As he said this, I saw his eyes become watery, and I, too, felt the emotion. It was an unexpected, touching moment for all of us—Simon, Adrian, and me.

At that moment, I realized just how much the Kitchen family appreciated that I was working with their family member Alfred's story and how, in a way, this was honoring his life. Although it might sound a bit sentimental, I felt deeply moved and full of respect for that moment.

After lunch, Adrian became tired and left for his home, but not before we took a photo together in front of the pub's memorial, where Alfred's name is also inscribed.

## Simon Kitchen and His Family's Memories

After taking the photo, Simon, his son Dani le, my son Erik, and I stayed behind at the pub. We were far from finished talking, and there was much to look at. Simon pulled out a bag filled with items related to Alfred Kitchen.

Simon shared how he had come into contact with a Dutchman named Dick van der Kamp at a symposium. Van der Kamp, in turn, knew someone named Jan Westerink from Kampen, who knew more about a Mosquito that had crashed in November 1944. While telling me this story, Simon pulled out a document—the previously mentioned report *Sunset*, written by Jan Westerink in 1992. In the report, Westerink described how, as a young boy, he often roamed the dike near the *Zeebeumple* with friends. He recalled how, on the evening of November 28, a plane flew overhead at a low altitude. The next day, from school, they saw that a tall English pilot was being held captive in the barracks of the Van Heutz garrison by German soldiers. In the months that followed, Westerink and some of his friends often visited the coast and saw the wreckage of a plane lying about "100 yards" offshore. They visited the wreck several times that winter but never saw Kitchen's body.

It wasn't until March 1945 that the body emerged. Three of Westerink's friends were instructed by two German soldiers to row a small boat to the wreck. The Germans sat in the boat. Upon reaching the wreckage, the body was discovered. The body was stuck, and when they tried to pull it loose, one of the legs remained behind. The same day, the body was handed over to the police, and shortly afterward, it was buried in Kampen's IJsselmuiden cemetery. My initial reaction to the story was that Westerink's description seemed quite precise, making it unlikely that he had made it up. However, I realized that further research was needed to verify the reliability of his account.

Simon handed me a copy of this report, along with a stack of other papers. Among them was Alfred Kitchen's complete RAF logbook, a 63-page document listing all the missions Kitchen had flown. Kitchen's first flight was on July 1, 1942. The logbook noted that he flew as a "map-reader," the flight began at 12:50 PM, and it lasted two hours and twenty minutes over England. On the penultimate page, it stated that on November 27, 1944, Kitchen was on board as a navigator, along with pilot Williamson, and that they departed at 6:00 PM. Under



“remarks,” it mentioned that the mission was to Neuss, Germany. The word “missing” immediately stood out. It was Kitchen’s last flight.

It quickly became apparent that the date mentioned in Westerink's report (November 28, 1944) did not match the date in Kitchen’s logbook (November 27, 1944). I concluded that the date of November 27, 1944, was more likely to be accurate, as it was written on the day itself, whereas Westerink's account was written 47 years later, in 1992.

In total, Kitchen's logbook recorded 387 flights, 82 of which were abroad, totaling over 459 hours of daytime flying and over 243 hours of night flying. Kitchen flew many practice flights and trained for various scenarios. On February 24, 1943, he conducted a high-altitude test with pilot Little, reaching 31,000 feet (about 9.5 km). On April 3, 1943, he flew his first mission over occupied Europe. At 6:27 PM, they took off for a target in Malines, Belgium. They flew back via Turnhout and Tilburg. On his third mission over occupied Europe, the plane was hit by German anti-aircraft fire near Amsterdam. Kitchen’s logbook stated, "hit by flak near Amsterdam."

Kitchen was also a navigator during D-Day! A Mosquito ML 961 departed on June 6, 1944, at 12:25 AM for a mission over Lisieux, about 20 km south of Le Havre. It was his 51st mission. It was remarkable to read that Kitchen had flown on D-Day! Near Lisieux, they dropped two “TL red” markers, likely light markers for bombing targets.

Holding the logbook in my hands was overwhelming. It was impressive. I became silent. Eighty-two missions to occupied Europe. Sometimes to drop bombs, often as a pathfinder, marking locations with light bombs for larger bombers. Various thoughts raced through my mind. What had this man seen? Did he witness comrades being shot down? Was he scared? Why did he fly? And then there was that last flight. He knew his wife was pregnant. How do you get into a plane, knowing that?

Simon noticed my silence. He rummaged in his bag and then showed me a piece of metal—a fragment from a German shell fired by a Flak (Flugabwehrkanone, or anti-aircraft cannon).

## **Alfred's Last Mission and the Distinguished Flying Cross**

Simon explained that Alfred had been posthumously awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) after the war. During a flight over Europe, his plane had been hit by anti-aircraft fire. The pilot was injured, and Alfred managed to remove the pilot from his seat and still flew the damaged aircraft back to England. This happened during his third mission over occupied territory on April 9, 1943. A day later, when Alfred's parachute was inspected, a piece of German shell was found lodged in it. To this day, this fragment remains a family keepsake. Simon said that this German-made fragment, designed to kill, brought luck to their family. As he told this story, he pulled out a small box, opened it, and showed me the beautiful DFC medal! The medal had been awarded to Edna at Buckingham Palace in London in 1946.

## **Bringing the Story of a Far-Off War Closer**

While examining and trying to understand all these items, I realized that Alfred Kitchen's story—this distant, large-scale war of long ago—suddenly became very personal and close. I began to see Alfred more as a person, someone with a life of his own, someone I was getting to know more and more.

Simon stood up, paid for our meal, and took us to the house where his mother, Edna, had lived until recently. Before we entered, Simon pointed out a sign on the front of the house. I was frozen to the spot. The sign read: *Kampen Kot*.

## **The Visit to Edna Kitchen's Home**

When we entered, I saw several photos on the wall. Edna with two men. It was clear to me that these were Alfred and his younger brother Benjamin.

Simon went upstairs and came back down with a painting. It was painted by Jan Westerink. The painting showed the IJsselmeer, a small boat with soldiers, and a few figures pulling the

boat, with something lying in the water in the distance. It was a depiction of the day in March 1945 when Jan Westerink was involved in recovering Alfred Kitchen's body.

### **Conflicting Stories: German Colors and the Crash Location**

During our visit to Edna Kitchen's house, Simon and I discussed various matters. One of the topics that came up was memorial post number 2, located at the Torenbosje. I told Simon that the post stated that Kitchen's plane flew in German colors. Simon was stunned. This was completely new to him, and he strongly doubted the truth of this claim. I promised to investigate further. I also mentioned that I would continue searching for the correct crash location. While the memorial post at Torenbosje suggested that the crash site was near the forest, Westerink's report indicated that the location was slightly west of Kampen. The two locations were about 7 kilometers apart.

Simon also told me about visits that Edna, his father Benjamin, Adrian, and he had made to Alfred's grave in Kampen. Edna had already visited the grave in 1946. Adrian visited it in 1975, and in 2001, Simon, Adrian, Edna, and Benjamin visited the grave together. Simon mentioned that he planned to visit the grave again soon.

### **Back in the Netherlands**

Where to start? How should I continue this investigation? Which questions should I address first? What about the location of the crash? And the claim about the German colors? If the Kitchen family is still alive, could there also be family members of pilot Williamson? Could there still be relatives of Jan Westerink? Is there any official documentation about the recovery of the wreck? Who are the creators of memorial post number 2? These were just a few of the many questions swirling through my mind. Unsure how to proceed, I decided to let it rest for a while.

However, this didn't last long. Now that Simon and I were connected through WhatsApp and email, we exchanged many documents. Simon sent me copies of letters that Alfred wrote to his wife, Edna, and links to websites with more information about Alfred's last flight. The British National Archives revealed that on November 27, a group of 290 aircraft, consisting of 173 Halifaxes, 102 Lancasters, and 15 Mosquitos, flew to Neuss in the Ruhr area. The report indicated that Neuss was heavily bombed, and many fires broke out due to these bombings. It also stated that only one Mosquito was lost during this operation, and that was Alfred's.

The letters Alfred wrote to his wife moved me deeply. It felt almost like peeking into someone's private life without their consent.

Alfred missed his wife. In his second-to-last letter, dated November 24, 1944, he wrote:

*"Just a few lines before I go to bed tonight. I know how much you like to hear from me each day, and you are disappointed when you don't get a letter. I was unlucky myself today and missed your letter, darling, although I can't expect you to write every day without fail."*

He closed his letter with:

*"It seems a long time since I saw you, sweetheart, and I almost forget what it's like to sleep with you—it just seems like a dream to me."*

In Alfred's final letter to Edna, dated November 26, 1944, he wrote about their worries:

*"In your last letter, darling, you seemed a bit fed up because you hadn't received a letter for a couple of days—sorry, darling. What makes you worry? Do you think I am on ops, Ed? I never told you I was doing any operations, so I don't know where you got that idea from."*

In this letter, he also mentioned the possibility of getting 48 hours of leave, now that he had flown more than 80 missions. He wanted to save this time off for when their first child would be born. He ended the letter by describing how much he missed her:

*"I felt a bit fed up with camp yesterday, so I went into Bedford with the boys on the Liberty Coach. Nothing much to do except have a pint or two. I'm getting over it this afternoon, but I felt lousy this morning. When I got there, I felt as though I ought to be jumping on the train to*

*come and see you—it made me feel quite homesick for you, sweetheart. Cheerio darling, longing to see you. All my love, Alf xxxxxxxxxxxx.”*

Reading this was both impressive and emotional. Alfred was working extra hard to earn 48 hours of leave so he could be present for the birth of his child. He missed his wife dearly and undoubtedly felt a great sense of powerlessness. The fear of missing his child’s birth weighed heavily on him. And then, unexpectedly, he had to go on a mission to the Ruhr area.

It was unexpected because, as it later became clear, Alfred wasn’t supposed to fly that night. His regular pilot, "Gibby," was sick. However, Maurice Williamson’s regular navigator was also sick, and Alfred was asked to take over the duty. His mind was on the 48-hour leave, his child’s birth, and supporting his wife. And so, Alfred said yes and joined the mission on November 27, 1944. He would never return.

## **Visiting the Airgunners Room in Dronten**

After my trip to England, a lot of information came in—sometimes conflicting, sometimes supportive of other data. To move forward, I decided to contact the *Stichting 4 mei herdenking Dronten* (the Dronten May 4th Memorial Foundation). The foundation’s purpose is to organize the annual Remembrance Day on May 4th in Dronten. The foundation also maintains a special room in the Meerpaal in Dronten, dedicated to the Airgunners, with a permanent exhibition.

After getting in touch with board member Willem Visscher and learning that the Airgunners Room was open every other Wednesday, I decided to visit on the next available date.

Present were the chairman, Dirk Drog, and board member, Willem Visscher. After introducing myself, we exchanged information. I learned that the foundation was partly responsible for the sixteen crash memorial posts in Eastern Flevoland. I told them about my search, my findings, and the conflicting information I had uncovered. Mr. Drog explained that they had based their information on the documentation left by the late recovery officer, Gerrit Zwanenburg.

During this initial meeting, we also discussed the handover of the flyers' monument, which takes place every April in preparation for the May 4th Remembrance Day. Each year, a new class of 7th-grade students from one of Dronten's elementary schools is responsible for cleaning the monument. During the handover ceremony at the town hall, Mayor De Jonge gives a speech, accompanied by a talk from another guest. For 2017, this guest was to be a woman from the north of the country who had been active in the resistance during the war. However, Mr. Drogt asked if I would be willing to step in if this woman could not attend, to tell the story of the Mosquito crash. I agreed.

At the end of my visit, it was also mentioned that Simon Kitchen planned to visit the Netherlands during the first week of May. Mr. Drogt assured me that if this happened, Simon and I would be welcome as guests at the May 4th commemoration. A few weeks later, both events were confirmed. I would give a presentation on April 5, 2017, to the elementary school students at the town hall, and Simon and his son Daniéle would be guests during the May 4th commemoration.

## **The Kitchens in Dronten**

On May 3, 2017, I met Simon Kitchen and his son Daniéle for the second time, this time at the Stadshotel in Kampen. After reintroducing ourselves, we immediately went to the cemetery and laid flowers at Alfred's grave. It was a special moment. Seeing Simon and Daniéle at Alfred's grave, laying flowers—it was incredible to think that all of this had happened because, two years earlier, I was asked to write a story about the Torenbosje. Life can be extraordinary.

The next day, I took Simon and Daniéle to the Torenbosje and the location of the Zeebeumpie. In the afternoon, Simon was interviewed by a journalist from the local Dronten newspaper, *Flevopost*, and later we attended the commemoration.

For Simon and his son, these were profound moments. The introduction to the two locations was deeply surreal for them. Both men found the information on the plaque at memorial post number 2, which stated that the plane had flown in German colors, strange and disturbing. Simon mentioned that, in April 2000, Jan Westerink, along with Adrian, Edna, and Benjamin

Kitchen, had visited the location with him. Dick van der Kamp, the man who had established contact between the Kitchens and Jan Westerink, was also present. When we looked at the photos from that meeting in 2000, it became clear that they were taken in the area near the Zeebeumpie.

### **May 4, 2017: Commemoration in Dronten**

On the evening of May 4, 2017, Simon and his son were specially welcomed by Mayor De Jonge during the commemoration ceremony at the Meerpaal in Dronten. Afterward, Simon and his son laid flowers at the flyers' monument. The next day, on May 5, Simon and Daniéle left the Netherlands. With all the stories and new information shared over those two days, the contours of what happened that fateful night were becoming clearer.

### **The Investigation Gains Momentum**

After Simon's visit, the investigation picked up speed. I contacted several experts, including Royal Netherlands Air Force recovery officers Arie Kappert and his successor, Bart Aalberts. Both provided interesting information. They explained that the documentation from the late recovery officer, Gerrit Zwanenburg, was not always complete. Kappert sent me a photo of the escape hatch from the Mosquito and provided a link to a publication called *Beam Bombers* by M. Cumming, from 1998. This publication described what happened on the night of November 27, 1944. It stated that on the outward journey of the mission, the aircraft caught fire and crashed into the Zuiderzee. The navigator died, and the pilot was captured as a prisoner of war.

From Willem Visscher of the May 4th Memorial Foundation in Dronten, I received a photo from the book *Born from River and Sea* by Van der Linde (2015), which mentioned the Mosquito crash near the Zeebeumpie. Visscher also sent me a 1941 photo from his family album, which showed the Zeebeumpie. The image made it clear just how shallow the water was near the coastline.

Then, thanks to an email from the webmaster of *Flevolanderfgoed.nl*, an interesting link was made to the website *mossie.org*. On this site, I found a web discussion involving someone named Paul Williamson. He was writing about his grandfather, Maurice Williamson, who was the pilot of the downed Mosquito. Paul mentioned that his grandfather had told him the plane wasn't shot down but had suffered engine failure and had to ditch in the sea, allowing his co-pilot to bail out earlier than his grandfather.

I decided to search for Paul Williamson online, and after some time, I found him. Paul Williamson, the grandson of Maurice Williamson, lives in Maryport, Cumbria, a town in northwest England near the Lake District. Paul was in possession of his grandfather's flight logbook and the diary that Maurice Williamson had written during his imprisonment after being captured by the Germans following the crash. In subsequent emails, Paul sent me copies of the diary and a letter his grandfather had written in May 1945 to Edna Kitchen, Alfred's widow.

What stood out in the diary was that Maurice had been imprisoned at Stalag Luft 1 in Barth, Pomerania, a location in northern Germany. This was completely different from the information on memorial post number 2 at the Torenbosje, which claimed that Maurice had been held at Camp 13 Weiden, in southern Germany. The diary clearly indicated that this information on the memorial post was incorrect. Paul sent me the entire diary, which told the poignant story of a man trying to survive in extremely difficult conditions. The diary described the hunger they experienced in the camp, and as the Russians approached, the tensions in the camp increased significantly. A few days before the official liberation, all the German soldiers disappeared, leaving chaos behind. Local women, mostly Germans, came to the former prisoners begging for protection, fearing the arrival of the Russians. Williamson vividly described this in his diary, expressing his own thoughts and emotions.

One of the last pages of the diary mentioned that on Thursday, May 10, 1945, the women of Barth were forced to go to the camp to care for the former prisoners. It was a touching account, but what stood out the most was that Williamson never mentioned the Mosquito crash in his diary. In that sense, the diary provided no new details about the night of November 27, 1944.



## **Paul Williamson's Contribution and New Discoveries**

Simon Kitchen was pleasantly surprised to hear that more information was coming to light from the Williamson family. For Simon, these contacts were new. He was not only surprised himself but also managed to surprise the Williamson family by sending them a letter Maurice Williamson had written on May 24, 1945, from Maryport, England. In the letter, Williamson described the events of their last flight. He wrote about a fire, how Kitchen and he struggled to control it, and how Kitchen got caught with his parachute in the escape hatch, losing consciousness due to the smoke. Williamson barely managed to escape. The plane crashed with Kitchen still on board.

In addition to this letter, Simon also sent a letter written by Williamson's wife to Edna Kitchen. Paul Williamson was delighted to receive these letter copies and immediately forwarded them to his aunt Helen, who lived in Australia. Helen was the daughter of pilot Maurice Williamson. In an email to me, Helen expressed her deep emotion upon reading the letters. She wrote:

*"It was sad for me to see my mother's handwriting, as I have nothing of hers in written form."*

## **The Search Continues: Contact with the Westerink Family**

With all this new information, I decided to keep searching. The story of Jan Westerink remained particularly intriguing. His report appeared to be the only eyewitness account of the Mosquito crash. After some online research, I discovered that Jan Westerink had passed away on April 18, 2016. This meant he had still been alive when my search began! I found contact details for the Westerink family and got in touch with his son, Hans. After some email exchanges, I arranged a meeting with Jan's widow, Joke Westerink, and their son Hans in Hoozeveer, Drenthe.

During the visit, I told them about my research. Mrs. Westerink mentioned that Jan's experiences during the war had made a deep impression on him, and he never spoke about them. For Hans, it was new to hear about the Kitchen family, and the story of the painting

was also new to him. However, Hans showed me something remarkable—a photo that had always hung in the Westerink home. It was a photo from the 1940s. This photo had been important to Jan, but the family didn't know why. With this photo and the painting, things became clearer. Jan had processed the events of March 1945 in his painting, drawing inspiration from a photo of the sky over Kampen during the war years.

## **Eyewitness Accounts and Final Insights**

On the way home from Hoogeveen, I thought that there might still be other living eyewitnesses. A few days later, I contacted *Brugnieuws.nl*, a news website mainly active in Kampen. The editor agreed to publish an appeal on the site, stating that I was searching for eyewitnesses to the crash on November 27, 1944. Within a week, I received ten phone calls from various people in Kampen, ranging in age from 82 to 93 years old. Six of these ten witnesses, independently of one another, confirmed that a plane had indeed crashed near the coastline, at the location of the Zeebeumpie, in the fall of 1944. One witness claimed to have seen a body in the wreck when he visited it with friends. Another said that during a visit to the wreck in the spring of 1945, a leg was seen. Several witnesses said they had visited the wreck and taken parts of it for use.

One witness identified himself as Jan Westerink's brother. This 83-year-old, Roelof Westerink, told me that his brother Jan had not personally been present when the body was removed from the plane. Others had done that. Furthermore, he stated that he was unaware of the contact Jan had had with the Kitchen family. When I called him a second time, Roelof again confirmed that his brother Jan had not been present during the recovery of the body. Another witness mentioned that he had seen the plane burning, and two witnesses claimed that the pilot had gone to the farm of Zwier Kanis to ask for shelter. Witnesses stated that this farmer was a member of the NSB (Dutch Nazi Party) but also harbored people in hiding. It is unclear whether this Kanis played a role in the pilot's arrest by the Germans.

## **The Research Nearing Its End, But Questions Remain**

Between May 2018 and June 2019, more information continued to come in. Sometimes it was information that I was already aware of, but occasionally new and previously unknown details surfaced. For instance, Dick Breedijk sent me data about the discovery of a Mosquito wing near the Torenbosje. The source was the book *In de schaduw van de Glorie* ("In the Shadow of Glory") by Veenstra, published in 1992. It stated that on November 14, 1963, large parts of the wing were recovered. "Since large parts of this machine were made of wood, it had not sunk deeply and remained largely above ground." The publication also circled location 16 on the map, indicating the area where the Torenbosje is now located.

Was this finding, and the publication describing it, in conflict with Westerink's eyewitness account and the oral testimonies I collected from the ten people in Kampen who responded to my call in *Brugnieuws*? I don't think so. Given that the Mosquito was a wooden aircraft, its parts could easily have drifted, potentially moving from the crash site at Zeebeumpie to the Torenbosje area. The many (oral) accounts about the Zeebeumpie location seem to be the most decisive.

## **Conflicting Information and the Unanswered Questions**

What remains strange is that my research didn't yield an answer to why the wreckage of Kitchen's Mosquito at Zeebeumpie was not officially recovered, and I have not found any documentation about it. There may be documents, but I have not been able to locate them.

Another puzzling detail is the statement on memorial post number 2, which says that the aircraft was flying in German colors. As mentioned earlier, this claim was upsetting for the Kitchen family.

In response to an email I sent to Mr. Kappert, the recovery officer of the Royal Netherlands Air Force, Kappert stated that he was unaware of any instances where British planes flew in German colors during the war. I also found nothing about this in the British National Archives.

However, another message from Breedijk provided some clarification. In his email, he again referred to Veenstra's 1992 publication. The text read:

*"It turned out that the paint covering the wings of this plane was a white-gray color not used by the British Air Force."*

A little further on, it said:

*"The most likely assumption that the Air Force could make about this plane is that it belonged to KG 200, a German Luftwaffe unit that operated captured British and American planes. Unfortunately, this is only a guess, as the facts have never been verified."*

It seems that the creators of memorial post number 2 based their information solely on the book by Veenstra. While Veenstra himself clearly stated that it was only a guess, the text on the memorial post presented it as fact:

*"What was special about this plane was that it bore the colors of a German aircraft."  
(Memorial Post 2, May 4th Memorial Foundation, Dronten)*

However, Breedijk's email offered relief regarding the issue of German colors. According to him, KG 200 did indeed have a Mosquito, but it was a B.IV model and not the B.XVI model that Kitchen flew from Little Staughton. Breedijk referred to the book *Geheimflüge* ("Secret Flights") by Smith, Creek, and Petrick, published in 2006. As for the paint, Breedijk noted that the white-gray colors mentioned in Veenstra's book could also have been used on British Mosquitos. He specifically referenced the B.IV model, a reconnaissance aircraft that did fly in these colors. Incidentally, the Mosquito I had seen at the De Havilland Aircraft Museum in Shenley was also gray in color. This makes it unlikely that the wreckage found near the Torenbosje was from a plane flying in German colors.

## **Memorial Post 2: Final Thoughts**

It has been demonstrated that some of the information on memorial post 2 is incorrect. For instance, the description of Maurice Williamson's imprisonment at Camp Weiden is wrong.

Williamson was actually held at Stalag Luft 1 in Barth, Pomerania. Additionally, the claim that the aircraft was painted in German colors is highly unlikely. It seems that certain publications and opinions were mixed together, creating a sort of “new truth.” Finally, it has been established that the Mosquito flown by Williamson and Kitchen did not crash near the Torenbosje, but rather near the Zeebeumpie, at the coordinates: N52°33'43.8", E5°50'40.5".

I presented my findings to several other experts. I contacted Arie Kappert and Bart Aalberts, the recovery officers of the Royal Netherlands Air Force, as well as Jan Nieuwenhuis from *Airwar4045.nl*, Teunis ‘Pats’ Schuurman from *teunispats.nl*, Nico Kwakman from *ZZairwar.nl*, Fred Vogels from *Back to Normandy*, and Bert Wijs and Astrid Doppert from the *Ongeland Foundation*. All of them, in various ways, agreed that my findings were closer to the truth than the information on memorial post 2. My conclusions were cross-checked with data from other sites, and many details matched.

## **New Crash Post and Suggested Adjustments**

Due to my findings, I suggested to the May 4th Memorial Foundation in Dronten that a new crash post be placed at the location on the Vossemeerdijk in Dronten, with the correct information. The crash post at the Torenbosje on the Oudebosweg could remain, but the text should be adjusted. It could mention that parts of a plane were found at this location—possibly parts of Williamson and Kitchen’s aircraft—but that this has not been definitively confirmed.

After the foundation discussed my proposal, a new post was indeed placed on the Vossemeerdijk in 2021, and the text at the post on the Oudebosweg was updated. “*That is wonderful news, Gert, thank you for all your work,*” was Simon Kitchen’s response when I shared this good news with him.

## Acknowledgments

I am aware that there may still be mistakes, ambiguities, or omissions in this account. To ensure that they were minimized, I submitted my text to many people—individuals with knowledge, passion, and involvement in the events of the past. I am grateful to these individuals for their feedback and information, and where appropriate, I incorporated their input into the text.

I thank the May 4th Memorial Foundation in Dronten for their cooperation. It was wonderful that Simon Kitchen and his son Dani le were honored guests at the 2017 commemoration. The event left a deep impression on the Kitchen family, and I will not soon forget it. I deeply appreciate the foundation's decision to place a new crash post and update the text at the post on the Oudebosweg.

I also want to thank the recovery officers Kappert and Aalberts for their insight into the documents and their research. The photo of the escape hatch was an incredible surprise. The Kitchen family was touched by this material. I was particularly moved when, in 2023, I was given the opportunity to see the escape hatch in person, thanks to the then-recovery officer, Cornelissen. Holding the hatch that prevented Kitchen from escaping was a powerful experience.

Teunis 'Pats' Schuurman deserves thanks for his information, his unbelievable database, and his encouraging words that kept me going. The same goes for Dronten resident Fred Vogels, who gave me valuable advice on how to proceed with the process. Jan Nieuwenhuis and Nico Kwakman provided information that helped me think further about what had happened. Their databases are impressive. I also want to thank Bert Wijs and, in the later stages, Dick Breedijk for their information.

It has been both moving and encouraging that I was able to "bother" all these individuals with my questions. Their enthusiasm was highly motivating for me.

Of course, I would also like to thank Annie Haverkort and Coby Dekker from the *Stichting rondom het Greppelveld* (Foundation around the Greppelveld), including the Torenbosje, for

asking me to write a story. Without this request, the story of the Torenbosje would never have been written, nor the story of Kitchen and Williamson.

My gratitude also goes to the Westerink family for providing insight into what motivated Jan Westerink, how he thought, and what troubled him.

Lastly, I want to thank Simon Kitchen and Paul Williamson. Both men provided me with deeply moving documents. The diaries, the letters, and the personal stories—they have affected me profoundly. Special thanks to Simon Kitchen, who patiently endured my endless questions and dug deeper into his own family's history. Throughout my journey, I realized more and more that Alfred and Maurice were simply men who wanted to live their lives. Not heroes, but ordinary guys who lived in extraordinary times. They did what they had to do, but they would have rather done something else.

Alfred's last words to his wife Edna in his letter often echo in my mind:

*"I felt as though I ought to be jumping on the train to come and see you—it made me feel quite homesick for you, sweetheart."*

## **Media Attention**

The press has devoted much attention to my research. Below are a few references to these reports:

- *De Volkskrant*, November 27, 2019.
- *Omroep Flevoland*, November 25, 2019.
- *De Stentor*, October 6, 2019.
- *Flevopost*, September 20, 2019.
- *The Herts Advertiser*, September 12, 2019.
- *De Drontenaar*, September 2, 2019.

For pictures see: <https://www.gertspeelt.com/kitchen>

