

KEEP REMEMBERING

America searches along with Menno

It is already more than a half year ago that Menno Polderman from Heinkenszand (The Netherlands, province of Zeeland) told this paper (called De Faam) an extraordinary story.

It was not only published by this Zeeuwse weekly on the front page, but recently an article appeared in the Grove City Record, a weekly. (Grove City, Ohio, United States.)

By Rachel van Westen

Heinkenszand - A little over six months ago Menno started his quest for next of kin of the crew of an airplane that crashed on June 22 1943 in the Wilhelminapolder. (a polder is a piece of land reclaimed from the sea). Six members of the crew were imprisoned (by the German occupiers) and four found death in this beautiful polder.

One day after this tragedy Menno's grandfather, Willem Gerardus Sonke, found a coat of one of the crew members. "My grandfather had to hand over the coat, but he was able to remove two insignia that have always stayed in our family." When Menno came across the emblems once more he felt the irresistible urge to find out what had happened exactly to the owner of the insignia and the other members of the crew. He concentrated on the history of this tragedy and asked this paper for assistance, hoping that there were still people alive who could tell him about his tragedy. He had only one goal: "We should never forget what happened here".

Eyewitnesses

The request for information in this paper resulted in two reactions from eyewitnesses. The first one was from a seventeen year old boy at the time. He heard the plane come over and saw that it was on fire. He jumped on his bicycle and looked at the burning plane until he was sent away by German soldiers. He saw parachutes on the ground but did not dare to look under them. The second eyewitness was a seven year old boy when he saw a parachutist land on top of a streetlight. Impressive stories but Menno wanted to learn more about the young men who at the time risked their lives for our freedom and even lost their lives in the Wilhelminapolder. He spent quite some time behind his laptop, the past six months.

Surfing for a, searching via Facebook, and googling for names and addresses he added time and again a missing piece of the puzzle.

His quest did not stay unnoticed in Grove City, because there too the local media picked up the news. So it came to pass that a journalist from the US tried to come into contact with a "Dutchman, Menno Polderman who lives in Heinkenszand in the Dutch province of Zeeland." A call for information was also

placed next to this article and so the search was not limited to Zeeland, but also in the USA people started looking for next of kin.

“By this time I now have contact with family members of nine of the ten crew members”, Menno tells us. Of course there were some difficulties that Menno came across during his quest, but he never considered quitting.

“I find it so important that this event will not be forgotten. I want to achieve that the story of this plane and its crew and what happened in the Wilhelminapolder in 1943 will be better known. A half year ago Menno expressed the wish to write a book about this plane and her crew and he hoped to be able to place a monument on the spot where it crashed. In the mean time he has collected quite some material for the book and the monument will be realised. Even stronger: the memorial is ready and a date has been fixed. On June 22nd 2017, the monument will be dedicated in the Wilhelminapolder.