

Stany Moortgat

Escape from the Enemy

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CONTENT

	Introduction
1	The remarkable testimony of Jules De Schouwer
7	Confirmation of the crash. Bomber Command Losses 1942
15	Harold DeMone's escape: a mystery
21	The discovery of the crash site
27	The air offensive on Nazi Germany
29	The OTUs are deployed
31	The air attack on Essen (Germany) The real story of Harold Edison DeMone
49	In hiding at the Horckmans Brewery, Humbeek
59	The Comet Line
85	A few final words
89	Epilogue
95	Annexes
111	Abbreviations and people
112	Sources
113	Photographs and documents

*“A handful of dust that the wind carries far away in
the absurd maelstrom of history”*

Nina Berberova (biography of the Russian author)

Foreword

Shortly after the Second World War broke out in 1940, the Royal Air Force (RAF) was quickly deployed in the fight against Nazi Germany. But the RAF needed manpower so announcements were placed in all the newspapers in the United Kingdom to recruit volunteers. The dire shortage of men led to calls for volunteers being placed in Canadian newspapers too. This was a huge success: thousands of Canadian volunteers joined their English counterparts.

Of the many that went into battle, few returned home. Many aircraft were shot down by German night fighters and anti-aircraft guns, and the crew rarely survived the crash. Others may have parachuted from falling aircraft, only to land in enemy territory. For most of them, their part in the war was over. They were taken prisoner and sent to German labour camps or were shot on the spot. A very small number were able to escape with the help of local civilians. They returned to their home countries using underground networks. During the night of 1 to 2

June 1942, a Wellington Bomber was intercepted by a German night fighter after a mission to Essen, Germany, and endured a heavy barrage. One of the aircraft's engines caught fire. Air gunner Sergeant Harold Edison DeMone was the first to parachute out of the burning aircraft, and he landed in Mechels Broek, a marshy area close to Mechelen.

Many books have been published about this incident, some recounting personal experiences with journal entries, others with official notations. The experiences of civilian witnesses and soldiers enable us to create a good picture of one of the darkest periods of our history and to imagine what it may have been like. It took me two years of research to be able to recreate as accurately as possible the journey that Harold DeMone took when he escaped. This book recreates his escape clearly and faithfully.

Stany Moortgat



Sergeant Harold Edison DeMone