

# AVIATION

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## CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL AIR SHOW 2021



**Gulfstream G700  
BREAKING SPEED  
RECORDS**

**British and Canadian Airmen  
Honoured in the Netherlands**

# Monument 'Rise' Unveiled for Bomber Crew

*Text and photography by Patrick Dirksen and Frank Mink of Tristar Aviation*

**In October 2021, a monument was unveiled in the Netherlands, in the city of Almere. This monument was erected to commemorate the crew of Short Stirling BK716, the bomber that was recovered from the Markermeer last year.**



The wreckage was discovered by accident in 2008, when part of a landing gear became attached to the anchor of a ship, but it wasn't until 2018 when recovery became a real possibility. In that year, the Dutch government funded 'National Programme Salvage Aircraft Wrecks' with the intention to recover aircraft wrecks that could possibly still hold missing crew members.

Stirling BK716 was shot down in March 1943 while returning home from a bombing mission over Berlin. Nobody was able to escape. The crew of seven consisted of:

Flying Officer John Frederick Harris (GB, pilot, 29)  
Sergeant Ronald Kennedy (GB, flight engineer, 22)  
Flying Officer Harry Gregory Farrington (Canada, observer, 24)  
Sergeant Charles Armstrong Bell (GB, wireless operator/air gunner, 29)  
Flying Officer John Michael Campbell (GB, air bomber, 30)  
Sergeant Leonard Richard James Shrubbsall (GB, air gunner, 30)  
Flying Sergeant John Francis James McCaw (Canada, air gunner, 20)

*Her Royal Highness Princess Margriet of The Netherlands unveiled the monument*



In the autumn of 2020, BK716 was the second aircraft to be recovered, and many larger and smaller parts of the aircraft were found. However, more importantly, during the recovery, human remains were also recovered. Based on DNA, three crew members have been positively identified, but based on the amount of bones found within the complete age range of 20 to 30 years (the age range of the crew), it is almost certain all crew members have been accounted for.

Originally, the unveiling of the monument had been planned for March 2021, but due to Covid 19, this had to be postponed. Now, with restrictions easing up, it was possible to fly in no less than 21 relatives from the United Kingdom and Canada. A three-day programme had been planned for them, including a visit to the actual crash site and of course the unveiling of the monument as main items.

The mayor of Almere, Franc Weerwind, was the first to give a short speech. To him, the ultimate goal of this monument is “to remember events like this must never happen again!” He was followed by the commissioner of the king Leen Verbeek, who recalled, “the sound of the planes over the Netherlands gave us hope of liberty, of restoring freedom. The Stirling was one of those planes”. Finally, councillor Hilde van Garderen said, “the artwork is an invitation to the young generation to stop and reflect”. To emphasise the importance of involving youth, 11-year-old local pupil Stella van Velzen recited a self-written poem called ‘Trapped’. Next, the unveiling was done by the mayor and Her Royal Highness Princess Margriet of the Netherlands, who was actually born during World War II in Canada, while the royal family was in exile. Also present were the ambassadors of the UK and Canada, the military attaché of Canada in the Netherlands, as well as numerous Dutch veterans and active serving military.



*Wreath laying by Canadian ambassador and military attaché, and Mayor of Almere Franc Weerwind giving his speech*

British artist Laura o’Neill, who lives in Almere, used one of the original Bristol engines of the Stirling as basis for her artwork called ‘Rise’. The crew member sitting on it has features of all seven members of the BK716 crew. While working on it, o’Neill was surrounded by pictures of the crew members, and the piece developed during the building process. The monument has been placed in the ‘Bos der Onverzettelijken’ or ‘Forest of the Unyielding’, next to the tree which commemorates Anne Frank, where the statue seems to be staring at. The final result was very much appreciated by the relatives. As the niece of John Campbell put it, “It is a beautiful piece of work! Not such a modern thing where you actually have to tell everybody what it means”. All families got a miniature version of the monument.



*Relatives in front of the monument*

Relatives felt overwhelmed by the positive way in which they were treated. During the three days everybody spent together, a lot of insights and experiences were shared. As Richard McCaw, nephew of Flying Sergeant John McCaw, the Canadian air gunner of the crew, said, "This is really something. We never knew what happened to the bomber and its crew. And now suddenly there is a Dutch connection between us". Edith McLeod, the 94-year-old sister of Harry Farrington, couldn't make it all the way from Canada, but she was represented by her daughter Fiona Williams. McLeod, however, followed the ceremony via livestream and was very happy: "I think it is marvellous. I didn't think it would ever happen. [...] We basically knew he was shot down. And that was all we knew." Some of the relatives had already been in contact in the past, but these emotional three days, and the closure they finally gained, formed a strong bond between them.

In October 2022, the remains of the crew will be buried at the Jonkerbos War Cemetery near Nijmegen. It is hoped many relatives can again be present there.

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