

British airman laid to rest 78 years after fatal flight

Brydie Hurrell from outside Melbourne and other family members attended the service for RAF pilot Flight Sergeant (Flt Sgt) William Robert Stephen Hurrell, at Jonkerbos War Cemetery on Thursday 29 September. Also there were representatives of the RAF, the British Embassy in the Netherlands, and dignitaries from the municipality of Lochem. Members of the RAF's Queen's Colour Squadron (QCS) bore his coffin.

The ceremony was led by Rev. (Squadron Leader) Josephine Critchley, Chaplain at RAF Honington, and organised by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), also known as the 'MOD War Detectives'.

The remains of Flt Sgt Hurrell were discovered in 2019 after an excavation of an aircraft by the Joint Aircraft Recovery Team of the Netherlands MoD on farmland near the village of Eefde in the municipality of Lochem, as part of the Netherlands WWII National Aircraft Recovery Program, of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Working alongside the Recovery and Identification Unit of the Royal Netherlands Army and The RAF Air Historical Branch, JCCC reviewed documents confirming the plane recovered was from a Typhoon MN582 of No. 175 Squadron RAF which crashed on 26 September 1944. Flt Sgt Hurrell was flying in a formation of six aircraft on an armed reconnaissance north of Arnhem when they were attacked by up to 60 enemy ME109's.

Tracey Bowers, JCCC said:

It has been an absolute privilege to arrange this ceremony for Flt Sgt William Hurrell and I am grateful for the help given by the community of Lochem. I am honoured to stand alongside his military and blood family to pay him this final tribute.

William Robert Stephen Hurrell was born on 1 May 1923 in London to Sydney and Daisy Hurrell. His enlistment service records from March 1941 state his religious denomination as "C of E" and show he lived in the East Ham area of London. Prior to his RAF career he was an apprentice fitter and turner. After joining the RAF, he served in India and America before receiving his pilot's wings in 1942. He was promoted to Flt Sgt a year later.

Brydie, Flt Sgt Hurrell's great niece, said it was important she travelled to the Netherlands:

We grew up knowing that Bill was shot down at the end of the war and that his parents had never found him. We knew he was in the Netherlands – we just weren't sure where exactly. When we heard

about the salvage project we were over the moon. Representing the rest of my family back home means a lot. Bill's parents and his brother, my grandfather, died never knowing where he was , but we know have closure for them and for ourselves.

The RAF's Queen's Colour Squadron (QCS) remove the Union Flag from Flt Sgt Hurrell's coffin before laying him to rest. (Copyright: J.A.M.Y. (Jacqueline) Spijkerman, Senior Communications Advisor, Netherlands Ministry of Defence).

The ceremony included poems and readings by serving RAF personnel, family, and dignitaries from Lochem; a town instrumental in the recovery of Flt Sgt Hurrell's remains.

Rev.Critchley, said:

As we have committed Bill's body to the ground, we go from here knowing that his selfless actions ensured the security of so many; as he laid down his life, we are assured that he rests in God's loving presence and is at peace.

Director for the Central and Southern European Area at the CWGC, Geert Bekaert, said:

We are privileged to host this ceremony today, dedicated to Flt Sgt Hurrell and the ultimate sacrifice he paid fighting for his country 78 years ago. It is our honour to commemorate him and care for his grave in perpetuity.