

**Trenches to Foxholes**

# WWII air crew to be honored in local community

**By Cis Spook**

USAG Benelux Public Affairs

The coming weekend, April 11 and 12, two ceremonies will be held in the local community to honor WWII crew members. The first ceremony organized by the city of Silly will be April 11 at 3 p.m. in Fouleng where a B-17 nicknamed Royal Flush crashed in 1944 after it was hit by flak batteries on Chièvres Air Base then occupied by the Nazis.

The airplane came back from a bombing mission over Schweinfurt, Germany and was heading back to England. As the plane was nearing the coast, a puff of smoke and some debris appeared on the left wing of the B17. The pilot, 1st Lt. James R. Lavin, ordered his crew to bail out, but soon after, the plane crashed in a field. Of the ten crew members, six were killed in the explosion of the plane. One crewmember was injured, but still managed to bail out and was evacuated by the Nazis to a nearby hospital. Three crew members evaded capture with the help of the Belgian Resistance and eventually made it back to England.

For the 70th anniversary of the crash, one of the crew members who evaded capture and last survivor of the crew, Tech. Sgt. Troy Hollar, top turret gunner, came back to the crash site for the first time after the war. Some 20 family members also travelled from the States to attend the commemoration.

This year's ceremony will be attended by city officials, a couple of local witnesses of the crash and members of the 424th Air Base Squadron.

The second ceremony is April 12 at 10 a.m. in Dergneau, close to Ronse, honoring the crew of the B24 nicknamed Pale Ale. The ceremony will be attended by the son of Bombardier 2nd Lt. Henry Wynia.

The plane crashed because the control cables snapped which resulted in a downward spiral. The pilot, 2nd Lt. Robert Gordon, tried to help two of his crew, 2nd Lt. Ferdinand M. Kjar, the navigator and Sgt. Harold H. Hendrickson, nose gunner, to get out of the plane but didn't succeed. All three were killed in action. The pilot is still Missing in Action as his body was never recovered. The plane exploded as it touched the ground due to its full bombs load still aboard. Both ceremonies are open to all.



Archive Picture

*Christian Leclercq, Mayor of Silly, pays tribute to the B17 Royal Flush crew members during last year's ceremony in Fouleng, April 13, 2014.*

**April 11 at 3 p.m.**  
**47, Rue de la Miraine - 7830 Fouleng**  
 Ceremony honoring the crew members of the B17 Royal Flush that crashed in a field in Fouleng, April 13, 1944. Six of the crew were killed in the explosion of the plane; four survived.

**April 12 at 10 a.m.**  
**Monument is close to Rue du Marais 2 - 7912 Dergneau**  
 Ceremony honoring the crew members of the B24 Pale Ale that crashed in Dergneau, February 20, 1945 due to technical defaults. Three of the crew were killed in the crash; seven survived.

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