



Year 9 | Number 2 | Mission Belle Foundation

Introduction

Before you another newsletter of the Mission Belle Foundation. We like to involve you with the monument at the Lek dike in Nieuw-Lekkerland. A place that reminds us every day what happened during World War 2 and to this day we remember the deceased soldiers.

Thanks for your involvement and support! It will help us to keep on telling the story of the Mission Belle and to pass it on to the younger generations!

A greeting in brotherhood and solidarity,

André Hoogendoorn, chairman
Heleen Stam, secretary
Cor Brand
Piet Vat
Pieter van de Minkelis

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Remembrance Day, May 4th, 2026



On Monday May 4th, 2026, we have, in brotherhood with many others, reflected those who have died for the freedom of our country. It was good to experience that, from our village and county, there was a lot of sympathy.

Dirk van der Borg laid a wreath at the Mission Belle Monument. Especially that we are living in freedom now, is it important that we keep on remembering. As a reminder and as a tribute to those who gave their lives for our freedom. So that we will be aware that freedom is not self-evident and asks for responsibility.



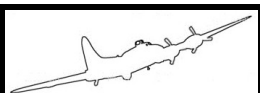
Memorial Day, May 25th, 2026

On Monday morning, May 25th, 2026, there was a short remembrance at the monument.

This moment was for Memorial Day. On this American remembrance day, their military, who lost their lives in wartime, will be remembered.

The chairman of the foundation, André Hoogendoorn, gave a welcoming word. After that, Evert de Bruijn held a short speech, where he gave an image of the incredible courage of the men and the fearful circumstances they have been in. Then Evert, on behalf of the Mission Belle Foundation, laid a wreath. Afterwards, there were 2 minutes of silence.

At the end, the American and the Dutch flag were raised in top by Evert de Bruijn and board member Cor Brand.



Heightened: Visits to Neuville-en-Condroz and Margraten cemeteries

Meditative I stood there. In front of me a field stretches out, filled with white crosses, placed inculcable in rows and maintained impeccable. The silence is almost tangible. With a mind full of thoughts I look at the crosses and the men who found here their final resting place.

Today I am here with a specific purpose: find the Mission Belle crew.

A few months ago, I drove my car, coming back from the Ardennes, along the cemeteries of Neuville-en-Condroz and Margraten. Although I visited both locations before, it felt special again to contemplate the history that is so poignantly present here.

This time I am looking for three names: **John F. Healy**, **Harland V. Sunde** and **Doyle C. McCutchen**. Three crew members who didn't survive their last mission.



First, I visited the grave of **John F. Healy**¹, called Johnnie by his comrades. They described him as ‘a rough Irishman from Long Island, New York’ and as a tireless worker. Aboard the Mission Belle he was the tail gunner, one of the most dangerous positions on the plane. Especially the backside of a bomber was the prime target of enemy fighters first.

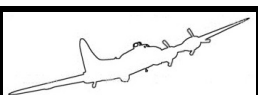
Also during this mission, the Mission Belle was attacked from behind. Johnnie got hit and called for help. Lieutenant O. D. Tully, the first aid officer aboard, ran to him. When he tried to get Johnnie from his awkward position, a new attack came. A Focke-Wulf Fw-190 opened fire and many holes drilled the backside of the plane. Johnnie got hit again.

Tully would later describe what he saw right in front of him: ‘They shot him right before me in pieces, or as you could say, straight in my lap... Healy died behind his guns.’²

I stayed for a while at his grave, before I left for Margraten.

¹ Healy is buried at the Ardennes American Cemetery, section C, row 5, grave 15.

² First Healy was missing, but when the plane was extracted on July 26 th , 1955 his remains were found.



Arrived at Margraten, I went looking for the graves of **Harland V. Sunde**³ and **Doyle C. McCutchen**⁴.

First, I walk towards the grave of Harland V. Sunde. Sunde was the pilot of the Mission Belle. Sunde was, as Tully said, ‘one of the best mannered and steady guys Tully ever had met’. ‘Harland was a good, Swedish guy from Minneapolis, Minnesota.’

Sunde was hit during the First attacks. He had a 20mm-hole in his loin area and a piece of his ear was shot off. Despite his injuries, Sunde kept clear for a while and gave his instructions to the other crew members. Shortly before the emergency landing, copilot Sweaney took over control of the plane. Sweaney thought at that moment that Sunde wasn’t alive anymore and made the emergency landing.

After the landing, Sweaney did try to take Sunde from the cockpit, but could not do so at that moment. Assuming that Sunde was dead, he had to leave him in the plane. But Sunde was still alive and despite his injuries, he was still able to leave the plane. Tully later remembered that he and Sunde jumped off the wing in an attempt to swim. Because the rescue raft was already too full, Sunde gave his place to Roger Christensen. Without knowing it, he signed his own death sentence.

Josephson saw that Sunde was taken by the river, bleeding and calling for help, before he disappeared from sight...⁵

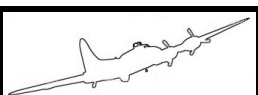
Again I stood there for a while and try to imagine how it should have been, before I walked to the grave of McCutchen.



³ Sunde is buried at the American Cemetery Margraten, section O, row 9, grave 12.

⁴ McCutchen is buried at the American Cemetery Margraten, section J, row 3, grave 20.

⁵ Sunde was found six months later in the reed lands along the Lek river, on June 12 th , 1944.





McCutchen, called Mac by his comrades, was the ball turret gunner of the Mission Belle. McCutchen came from Rupert, Idaho. ‘He was a good ball turret gunner, had guts and was decisive for two’, Tully told.

Severely wounded and with a broken leg, McCutchen got stuck in the plane. But Culver could get him from the sinking plane. Josephson described it later as: “Although Mac could get out of the plane, he could not get away from it more quickly as he should and the plane broke into pieces. The rear part of the plane fell exactly where Mac was.”⁶

The words I read before in the book about the Mission Belle, are getting more meaning at these places. An event which is just a passage on paper, gets at this place a face, a name and a grave.

I tried to imagine what it meant for other crew members. To no avail.

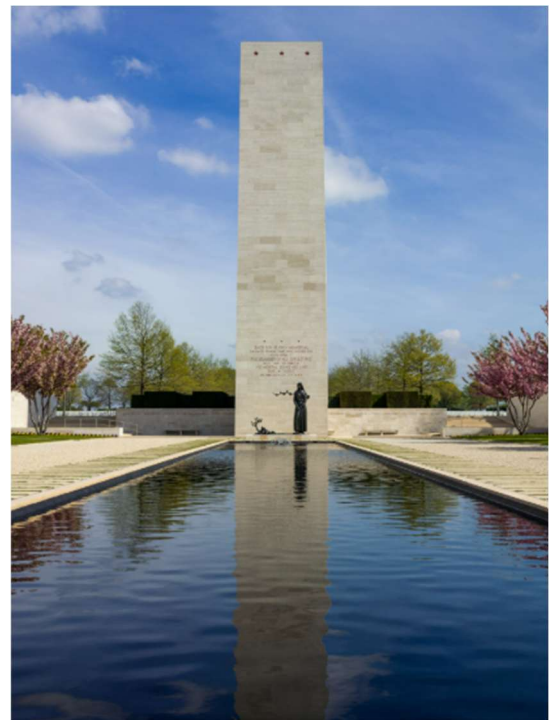
How close death could come during such a mission, is hardly to imagine. You can read the words, reconstruct events and visit the places where the men finally found their rest. But how it really was there, high above Europe, together in that plane and see your comrades fall away one by one...

You can’t really get there probably. We will still remember these men. Not just for who they were, but also for what they sacrificed their lives: **our freedom.**

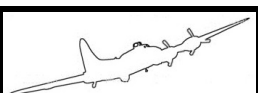
By closing this part I think about the words of General John J. Pershing:

“Time will not dim the glory of their deeds.”

Pieter van de Minkelis



⁶ Doyle McCutchen was found on May 30th, 1944 in the Maas river near IJsselmonde.



Agenda 2026

On Saturday November 28th November, 2026, the yearly remembrance at the monument will be held, to remember and honor the crew of the Mission Belle. This remembrance starts at 13:30 o'clock at the monument. For we will never forget. You are all cordially invited!

More information about the date mentioned above will be communicated through the known communication channels.

Open day Molenhoeve

Last June 13th, 2026, there was an Open Day at the Molenhoeve in Streefkerk. As Foundation we also got a place where we could present ourselves. With a lot of fun we made a lot of contacts and made new friends! Through this newsletter we would like to thank the organization of the Molenhoeve for this possibility!

Become a friend

For the maintenance of the monument there will be some costs, You could help us to manage these costs by becoming a friend of the Mission Belle B-17G. You will be a friend with a yearly contribution of at least € 15,-. You will receive twice a year a newsletter and a invitation for the yearly remembrance. You can enlist as a friend via: secretariaat@missionbelle.nl.

Mission Belle Book

For sale: the third print of our book 'We knew it would be a long day', including a lot of new information.

The book will cost € 14,95, mailing excluded. In this third print, the history is in a readable story, tied with the actuality of the monument and the importance to remind and remember. For this, the following chapters have been added; we have to do something with it, the unveiling of the monument, remembrance in perspective and 80 years after the emergency landing. There are also some additions and corrections made with the previous editions.

The book is, of course, created with a lot of photo's, so that many of the people who were at the unveiling in 2018 or the remembrance in 2023, will see themselves or others back in this book.

Action

When you decide to become a friend of the foundation and are interested in this fine book, we can offer you the book with a membership for a year for € 25,00 (mailing excluded). Send an e-mail to: secretariaat@missionbelle.nl

