

Although few in numbers, a handful of Netherlanders who made their way to Britain after escaping the Nazis made a significant mark in the air during World War Two. **Graham Pitchfork** recounts some of their stories

The roll of honour for 42 Dutch airmen awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) in recognition of their gallantry is impressive – two of them received it twice. While seven were given the Distinguished Flying Medal (DFM), many more were the recipients of Dutch and British non-operational honours such as the Order of the British Empire (OBE).

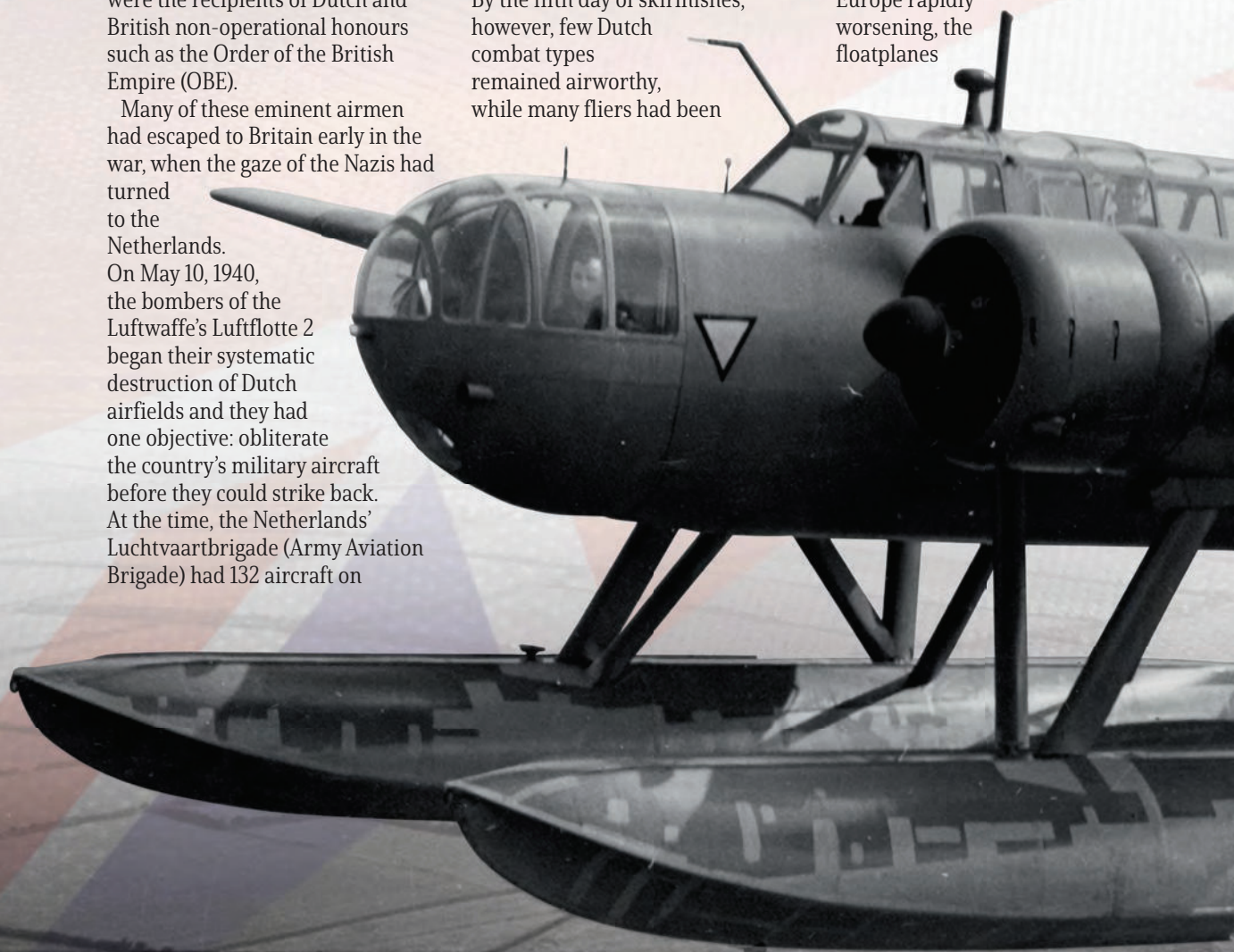
Many of these eminent airmen had escaped to Britain early in the war, when the gaze of the Nazis had turned to the Netherlands. On May 10, 1940, the bombers of the Luftwaffe's Luftflotte 2 began their systematic destruction of Dutch airfields and they had one objective: obliterate the country's military aircraft before they could strike back. At the time, the Netherlands' Luchtvaartbrigade (Army Aviation Brigade) had 132 aircraft on

strength – of which just 72 could be considered modern.

Although outnumbered, those aircraft and crews that survived the first onslaught fought valiantly against the overwhelmingly superior Luftwaffe (see *Brief Candles* in the March issue). By the fifth day of skirmishes, however, few Dutch combat types remained airworthy, while many fliers had been

injured or killed. Realising the odds were against them, the flying schools at Haamstede and Vlissingen (both southwest of Rotterdam) fled for England with their remaining machines on May 15. Following soon after, the nine Fokker TVIII floatplanes of the Marineluchtvaartdienst (Netherlands Naval Aviation Service), which had been used to patrol Dutch territorial waters, were soon dispersed to France.

With the situation in mainland Europe rapidly worsening, the floatplanes



DUTCH **DETERMINED**

escaped across the English Channel on May 25 where they formed 320 (Netherlands) Squadron as part of RAF Coastal Command. Based initially at Pembroke Dock in southwest Wales, it was joined by the newly formed 321 (Dutch) Squadron under the leadership of Lt Cdr H Kolf in June 1940. With both units utilising the Avro Anson Mk.I in the coastal patrol and anti-submarine role, they were soon guarding the Irish Sea and southwestern approaches. Several aircraft and crews were lost during these missions. That October, 320 moved to RAF Leuchars in Fife, Scotland and began to re-equip with the much more capable Lockheed Hudson Mk.III. Due to insufficient numbers of personnel, 321 Squadron merged with 320 on

January 18, 1941 under Lt Cdr W van Lier. While Dutch aircraft carried RAF markings and serial numbers, they were also adorned with their home nation's black-edged orange triangle insignia.

Hunters to Bombers

Settling into life at Leuchars, 320 Squadron would be tasked with conducting anti-shiping patrols and reconnaissance between Scotland and the Norwegian coastline. With their conversion complete, the unit flew its first Hudson operation on February 19, 1941. In April the following year the squadron moved to RAF Bircham Newton in Norfolk to patrol the Dutch coast – but the cost was high in both lives and aircraft.

In mid-March 1943, the squadron transferred to Bomber Command's 2 Group and moved to RAF Methwold, Norfolk where it converted to the North American B-25 Mitchell Mk.II. Almost immediately the unit was assigned to the Second Tactical Air Force. During the build-up to D-Day (June 6, 1944) 320 was instrumental in attacking railways, supply depots, construction works, V-1 flying bomb launch sites, airfields, gun emplacements and bridges.

The unit moved to the continent – to Melsbroek, northeast of the Belgian capital Brussels initially – in October 1944 and continued operating in the light bomber role until Victory in Europe Day on May 8, 1945. Its final mission of the war was flown from Achmer airfield in western Germany with

BELOW LEFT A Fokker T-VIIIW floatplane of 320 Squadron during a patrol from RAF Pembroke Dock. Lt Heye Schaper utilised this type during his mission behind enemy lines in October 1940.

KEY COLLECTION



11 Mitchells striking the railway marshalling yards at Itzehoe, just over 125 miles (201km) to the northeast, on May 2. Remaining at Achmer, 320 Squadron was disbanded in August 1945. During its time operating the Mitchell, the unit flew 2,433 sorties and dropped more than 9,000,000lb (4,082 tonnes) of bombs.

Rocket Chasers

Established at RAF Woodvale in Merseyside on June 12, 1943, 322 Squadron was a Dutch-manned Spitfire Mk.V unit with Fighter Command. Formed as an amalgamation of Dutch personnel

RIGHT Jacob t'Hart receives his DFC from AVM Donald 'Pathfinder' Bennett at RAF Upwood, Cambridgeshire, in June 1944. ROB VIS



May 1940. Having joined the Marineluchtvaartdienst in 1926, he was considered an 'old hand'.

In October he was briefed for a "special mission of the very greatest importance behind enemy lines", which involved retrieving various key resistance members – including a friend and colleague – Lt Lodo van Hamel. Parachuted into the Netherlands in late August, Hamel had established several resistance groups. With his mission complete, the plan called for a Fokker T.VIII to land on Lake Tsjükemar – the largest inland waterway in the Dutch province of Friesland – and pick up the group.

Selecting another pilot, S Lt Willem Ritte, and gunner/radio operator Cpl Klasinus van Tongeren to accompany him, Schaper's first

“He attacked so low that he returned home with part of the front door wedged in his radiator”



ABOVE Plt Off Jacob t'Hart (far left) watches his crew climb aboard their 103 Squadron Avro Lancaster for a raid from RAF Elsham Wolds. ROB VIS

RIGHT A 322 Squadron Spitfire Mk.Vb is prepared for another sortie at RAF Hawkinge, Kent on February 1, 1944.

from other squadrons, it began flying operationally immediately. Settling into a life of near constant scrambles and local patrols, in January 1944 the unit was soon often tasked with bomber escort. In June it started an intensive period of 'anti-diver' sorties against V-1s launched against the south of England and soon re-equipped with the more powerful Spitfire Mk.XIV. On July 8, Fg Off Rudy Burgwal destroyed five of the flying bombs in a single 90-minute sortie – he was killed less than a month later. Of the squadron total of 108 V-1 'kills', Burgwal was credited with 19 as well as sharing in the annihilation of a further five.

By autumn that year the squadron had reverted to flying ground-attack sorties in support of the allied armies advancing from France; on December 31 it landed on Dutch soil when it moved to Woensdrecht from Biggin Hill, Kent. From then until the end of hostilities in 1945 it was heavily involved with fighter sweeps, dive bombing and armed recce. Ending the war at Wunstorf, 13



miles (22km) west of Hanover, Germany, 322 Squadron was disbanded on October 7. Just under a year later, its number plate was passed to the 322e Jachtvliegtuig Afdeling (Fighter Division) of the Royal Netherlands Army at Twente Airbase, east Holland, in salute to its wartime record.

Gallantry and Masters

A pilot with 320 Squadron, Lt Heye Schaper was among the original few to arrive in England during

attempt to land on October 14 was thwarted by fog.

A second attempt was planned for the following night. However not only had their first attempt spooked the enemy into full alert, unknown to van Hamel and his men, they had been betrayed. Their arrest promptly followed.

The Germans had posted 200 soldiers and a myriad of machine guns around the area. Schaper arrived over the lake in the middle of the night and received the



correct signals. After touching down, he taxied towards a boat visible on the glass-like water. When just 150ft (45m) from the craft, a machine gun opened fire as searchlights illuminated the aeroplane. Realising the situation, van Tongeren immediately returned fire as Schaper slammed the throttles open and started zigzagging away. Managing to crawl into the air, Schaper

discovered his crewmen had been wounded and

his machine (AV961) was badly damaged – the fuel tank had been hit, the plexiglass nose section had been shattered and the flying controls were damaged. Taking the shortest route back to England, he alighted on the River Orwell, which flows into the North Sea at Felixstowe, Suffolk – but not before being fired upon by an overzealous local Home Guard patrol. The three men were decorated for their gallantry. Schaper was appointed Knight in the Military William Order of the Fourth Class and was awarded the DFC. The second pilot, Ritte, also received the DFC, while van Tongeren was awarded the DFM. These men were the first Netherlanders to receive British flying gallantry awards. Lt van Hamel was executed by the Germans on June 16, 1941 – just days after his 26th birthday.

When war broke out in 1939, Jacob t'Hart was studying at Cambridge University. After completing his flying training

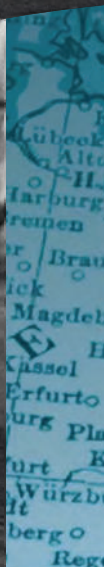
in Canada, he was promoted to pilot officer and posted to 103 Squadron at RAF Elsham Wolds, north Lincolnshire, to fly the Avro Lancaster. He completed 25 operations during winter 1943-44, 11 of which were against Berlin. During one of these raids, the target was obscured by cloud and on the return flight his aircraft was attacked and badly damaged by a night-fighter. However, he managed to return to Elsham where he made an expert landing. Volunteering for a second tour of duty, t'Hart joined Bomber Command's Pathfinder

Force with 156 Squadron. He was ranked as an acting flight lieutenant and soon gained the distinction of becoming a master bomber, directing aircraft and raids over the target. Having been awarded the DFC on June 3, 1944, he was granted a Bar to that

medal on February 23, 1945 – becoming one of just two Dutchman to achieve this.

LEFT In March 1943, 320 Squadron moved to RAF Methwold, Norfolk where it converted to the North American Mitchell Mk.II. The unit flew 2,433 sorties with the type. ALL GRAHAM PITCHFORK COLLECTION UNLESS STATED

BELOW Groundcrew service a 320 Squadron Lockheed Hudson Mk.III – possibly at RAF Leuchars, Scotland – post-October 1940.



TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT
 Capt Erik Hazelhoff
 Roelfzema flew
 72 missions over
 Germany – including
 25 to Berlin. He was
 awarded the DFC on
 July 3, 1945.



Robbert van Zinnicq
 Bergmann in the
 cockpit of his Typhoon
 – most likely Mk.Ib
 MN975/EL-B – some
 time in 1945.



The highest-scoring
 Dutch night-fighter ace
 Christiaan Vlotman
 (left) and his navigator
 Sgt John Wood
 pose with their
 ‘kill’ markings.

He emigrated to New Zealand
 following the war.

Nocturnal Horsemen

Fg Off Christiaan Vlotman was another one of the lucky few who were in England when the Germans invaded their homeland. Born in The Hague on February 12, 1915, he enlisted in the Dutch Army in Exile (Free Dutch Forces), before joining the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (RAFVR) in August 1941. Once he'd completed his flying training in Canada, Vlotman returned to the UK and was posted to 488 (NZ) Squadron with the night-fighting de Havilland Mosquito NF Mk.VIII at RAF Bradwell Bay, Essex. Crewing with Sgt John Wood, he claimed his first 'kill' in February 1944 when he downed a Dornier Do 217 bomber. Over the next four months he shot down three more aircraft, making him the highest-scoring Dutch night-fighter pilot. He was awarded the DFC on August 8, 1944, for which permission to wear the decoration was granted by Royal Decree No 6, dated September 28, 1944. Following the war, he returned to the Netherlands and became a captain with national carrier KLM. Vlotman died in October 2011.

Having served with the Koninklijke Landmacht (Dutch Army) as a cavalry officer at the

time of the German invasion, Robbert 'Bergy' van Zinnicq Bergmann soon escaped to Spain via Belgium and France. Managing to reach England in 1942 he, like many of his countrymen, joined the Dutch Army in Exile before shifting to the RAFVR in September that year.

Joining 181 Squadron and operating the Hawker Typhoon Mk.Ib shortly after D-Day, he was soon flying operations from hastily built airstrips in Normandy, France, providing essential close air support. He once commented: "For me, the Typhoon was love at first sight. Of everything I had seen in fighter aircraft up until then, it looked the most aggressive." As the allied armies pushed forward so did Bergmann and his colleagues. His aircraft was badly damaged on September 17, 1944 by flak, forcing him to make an emergency landing.

Low-level master

On November 4, 1944, 12 pilots – including 'Bergy' – were ordered to attack the north wing of the Dutch Royal Family's summer palace at Apeldoorn, which was being used by the German Waffen-SS as a headquarters. Extreme accuracy was essential, as evidence suggested that members of the Royal Household were still in residence.

The assault was a complete success. Bergmann later said: "We flattened

the whole north tower and hardly anything else was damaged. When I met Queen Wilhelmina after the war, she was impressed but thought it a pity that the SS were not billeted in her palace in The Hague. She said it would have been a marvellous target and she was sorry that I did not attack it too, since she disliked it so much!"

Bergmann also flew a low-level precision strike against the HQ of Germany's Commissioner for the Netherlands – Arthur Seyss-Inquart. He attacked so low that he returned home with part of the front door wedged in his radiator. In March 1945 Bergmann was posted to 182 Squadron and appointed a flight commander and continued to target road and rail assets. The crossing of the Rhine provided a change of priorities for the 'Tiffie' pilots as they were tasked with supporting the army by obliterating gun positions. On May 4, Bergmann led an attack against a large concentration of aircraft on the airfield at Flensburg, Northern Germany. After a successful operation he received a radio message ordering them to return immediately – the war was over.

Bergmann was awarded the DFC on May 15, 1945. At the end of hostilities, he transferred to the Koninklijke Luchtmacht (KLU) and was immediately appointed as the

Posing with one of his
 unit's Spitfires, 322
 Squadron CO Bob van
 der Stock was one of
 the three escapees
 who evaded capture
 following the 'Great
 Escape' from Stalag
 Luft III in 1944.

BELOW Avro Anson
 Mk.I K6285 of 321
 Squadron RAF, flying
 northwest of Tenby in
 Wales. Note that the
 aircraft still bears the
 unit code letters
 'MW' from its
 previous owner –
 217 Squadron.
 KEY COLLECTION





air aide-de-comp to Queen Wilhelmina.

Capt Erik Hazelhoff Roelfzema was studying law at Leiden University when the Germans invaded the Netherlands. Almost immediately he joined the Dutch resistance, escaping to England by stowing away on the Swiss-registered freighter *SS St. Cergue* bound for New York in June 1941. Once in London, he became involved in a secret service group called The Mews, with which he led 15 dangerous clandestine missions to land agents on the Dutch coast by boat. For this he was awarded the Military Order of William in June 1942.

Despite poor vision disqualifying him from mandatory service in the Dutch reserves before the war, Roelfzema joined the RAF and trained as a fighter pilot in Canada. However, on returning to the UK he was 'sidelined' and unable to get posted to an operational squadron. Bizarrely, a chance meeting with Wg Cdr Hamish Mahaddie led to him joining Bomber Command's Pathfinder Force flying Mosquitos with 139 Squadron. He completed 72 missions over Germany – including 25 to Berlin – and was awarded the DFC on July 3, 1945.

Like Bergmann, Roelfzema was appointed to Queen Wilhelmina's staff as her adjutant when she

returned to the Netherlands on March 13, 1945. He later emigrated to the US working initially as an actor and then a writer. His wartime memoirs *Soldat van Oranje* (Soldier of Orange) became a classic and was later made into a film during the late 1970s.

Great Escaper

For aircrew on the run in the Netherlands their progress through

the country being overrun, van der Stock made numerous attempts to escape to England and finally arrived in May 1941.

He joined 41 Squadron flying Spitfires and over the coming months claimed another six enemy aircraft destroyed, ensuring ace status. However, in April 1942 he was shot down over northern France during an attack on the railway marshalling yard at



the open, flat and heavily guarded terrain, bisected by countless waterways, could be agonisingly slow. The post-war words of Fg Off Charles Tapson, a Mosquito pilot shot down near Deventer in October 1944, summarised: "Our success was due entirely to the heroic efforts of the Dutch Resistance."

The story of one gallant Dutch evader provides a look at their initiative, determination and gallantry. It also illustrates the incredible bravery, resourcefulness, sacrifice and risk taken by their 'helpers' in sheltering those fighting for their liberty.

In May 1940 Flt Lt Bram 'Bob' van der Stock was a fighter pilot in the Luchtvaartbrigade. Battling valiantly during the German invasion, he claimed a Messerschmitt Bf 109 while flying a Fokker D.XXI over De Kooy airfield. With

Hazebroeck, dubbed operation Circus 122. Taken prisoner, van der Stock was incarcerated at the then newly built Stalag Luft III, 100 miles (160km) southeast of Berlin.

Making two unsuccessful escape attempts, his third and final effort came on the night of March 24-25, 1944 during the mass breakout, which became known as the 'Great Escape' – he was the 18th of 76 men to exit from the tunnel. Making rapid progress, the Dutchman reached the town of Utrecht, just south of Amsterdam, where the Resistance sheltered him. With their help, he travelled down one of the 'escape lines' to Spain and on to Gibraltar; he was one of just three men to successfully avoid capture. Of the total, 73 were recaptured – 50 of whom were executed by the Gestapo.

Returning to operations with 41 Squadron's Spitfire Mk.XIIs, van der Stock flew countless ground-attack operations and claimed seven V-1s, before taking command of 322 Squadron. As the most decorated airman in Dutch history, including being appointed to the Order of the Orange Nassau and an OBE, the Royal Netherlands Air Force named Lockheed C-130H Hercules G-781 in his honour during 2007. **FP**

The author wishes to thank Erwin van Loo for his help and advice.

ABOVE A Hawker Typhoon Mk.IIb heads for the runway at Volkel in Holland. Dutchman Robbert van Zinnicq Bergmann flew the type with great distinction with 181 and 182 Squadrons.

BELOW LEFT In honour of Bram 'Bob' van der Stock, the RNLAf named one of its Lockheed C-130H's (serial G-781) after him. It is seen here visiting RAF Waddington, Lincolnshire in 2013.

JAMIE EWAN

