

Cornelis G.A. de Oude, born 1929, citizen of Brouwershaven, Holland during WWII - personal account of the loss of B-24M 44-50747 and the Howard E. Young crew. (Cor served as a Nautical Officer with Holland-America Line, interrupted by two years as a Reserve Officer in the Royal Dutch Navy. From 1957 he was a Government Sea Pilot in the port of Rotterdam/Europoort, retiring in 1985. His hobby is history. Many thanks to him for contributing this accounting to the website)

As a boy of fifteen, I saw this plane come down. It was shot down by small boats of the Kriegsmarine (German Navy) lying in the harbour of Brouwershaven. The island of Schouwen was inundated by the Germans. Only Brouwershaven was rather dry. My whole life I have wondered why this crew had such a bad luck. The next island to the south was already liberated. If they had flown a bit southerly they had been safe. On our island there were no anti-aircraft guns. Only on the coastal defences on the west side. The two German ships in the harbour had only 2cm AA guns. And they had no vision because it was rather low water. and the plane was flying very low. They could only fire in a small arc upwards owing to the low water and the houses surrounding the harbour.

The Liberator approached very low over the inundated island from the east. There was only one or two feet of water on the lands, Then the pilot corrected the course, direction Brouwershaven. It looked like a sightseeing trip. If the pilot was looking for an emergency landing place it was not only the inundation that prevented this, but the Germans had erected Rommelspargel - or "Rommel's Asparagus" - sharp poles connected to explosives to prevent gliders and paratrooper landings. (When I say island, this is not true anymore. After the 1953 flooding all islands are connected by dams and Brouwershaven harbour is not tidal anymore. Also after the flood our landscape is changed very much. Also all the municipalities on the island are united in one municipality. Schouwen en Duiveland.)

The Germans had posted an observer in the tower of the church. He fired a flare as attention for the ships. The plane came straight over the harbour and was shot at by the ships and got on fire straight away. Especially the cockpit was burning. The plane turned 90 degrees to port. The forward turret fired some shots and the plane lost height. It crashed about a mile south of Brouwershaven.

Two crewmembers tried to jump out but they were found dead beside the plane. Germans and Dutchman were running in the direction of the crash. I jumped on my bike but a German soldier confiscated it, so I ran to the spot. I got my bike back from the soldier but was not allowed at the place. The wreck was not burning anymore as far as I remember. The German Commander was not even proud. He said looking at the bodies, "Das is Krieg" (That's war). The bodies of the crew were buried by Armenian soldiers working for the Germans. I remember that one of the Armenians placed a cross made of twigs on the grave and said a prayer on his knees. No Dutch were allowed to be there but you know how boys are. For me it was a shocking experience but the navy boys got me more angry in the afternoon when they painted two more planes (big ones) on the superstructure of their ship as a token of their ability. The other marks were for fighters but now they had a B-17 and a B-24 in one day.

As far as I remember the plane was not burning anymore when I came there. It was the only time I have been there. We were not allowed to come very close because unexploded bombs and ammunition were lying all over the place.

Two half-opened parachutes were lying besides the biggest remaining part of the plane. It happened very quick. From the first shot to the crash took no more than one or two minutes I guess.

My father forbade me to me to go there once more, not only because it was forbidden by the Germans. It was very dangerous. A month later he proved right. The Germans had removed the detonators from the bombs. But a boy from Brouwershaven found one of these detonators. It exploded and he was killed.

Seven heavy bombers crashed that day, all in our neighbourhood or on surrounding islands (four

B-17s and three B-24s). It still remains a big question why they came flying back so low on that day. My conclusion is that wrong information or wrong group navigation was involved. The island of Schouwen was frontline 1944-1945. No other allied heavy bomber crashed on the island of Schouwen during the whole war.

At that time there were not many Dutch people living in Brouwershaven because the Germans had sent people away. Our situation was not so good at that time. We had no electricity, no newspaper, no telephone, no doctor, all young men from 18 to 40 were sent to work in Germany. Ninety percent of the inhabitants were evacuated. A month before, 12 people were hanged because they tried to escape to the liberated island south of us. We were being shot at by artillery from Noord Beveland and shot at by fighter-bombers from the RAF. Germans issued stupid orders one day and the opposite the next day. Surrounded by Germans, army and navy, Armenians and Georgians on a small piece of land.

I see it as a duty to report for your website. I am grateful to have found your site to fill in some missing facts in my life and express my thanks for their sacrifice.