



Mosquitoes of 139 (Jamaica) Sqn

'Soldier of Orange' – Erik Hazelhoff-Roelfzema *by Ross Sharp*

On April 3rd, a special commemorative flypast took place over the former Valkenburg Naval Air Base at Katwijk in the Netherlands. The 'Fokker Four' a display team of Fokker S-11 'Instructors' were augmented by two Noorduyn Harvard IIb aircraft of the Royal Netherlands Air Force Historical Flight Foundation. This was quite fitting, as they were commemorating a man who had trained on the Harvard in Canada during WW2.

The flypast marked the centenary of the birth of Erik Hazelhoff-Roelfzema, a Dutch pilot, patriot, WW2 Resistance fighter, broadcasting executive and towering man of letters. A most distinguished gathering celebrated the event, which included his widow, Karin Hazelhoff Roelfzema, daughter Karna Hazelhoff Roelfzema, daughter Patricia Steur, Princess Margriet, Mr Pieter van Vollenhoven, Prince Pieter-Christiaan, Princess Anita, Prince Maurits and Princess Marilène of the Netherlands. It was singularly appropriate that Valkenburg was chosen, as the record-breaking musical 'Soldier of Orange', which tells the almost-improbable story of Erik Hazelhoff-Roelfzema, is staged on the former air base in a specially-constructed 'Theatre Hangaar'.

Headed towards a possible career in the law, his studies at the ancient Universiteit Leiden were interrupted by the German invasion of the Netherlands in 1940. There followed a period in the Resistance and imprisonment by the SS, before his eventual escape to England. As one of the almost 2,000 'Engelandvaarders', he sought to continue the fight by any means possible. In Eric's case this meant that he joined 'B' Flight, No 2 Initial Training Wing at Cambridge, in November, 1942. After instruction on the famous de Havilland Tiger Moth, he and other trainees were sent across the Atlantic to continue their training as part of the Empire Training Scheme. Posted to RCAF De Winton, near Calgary, as part of Course No. 78, he was streamed as being suitable for fighters, and joined Course 83 at No 34 Service Flying Training School at Medicine



Noorduyn Harvard IIb's
 Courtesy of EHR Foundation
 Photography:
 Samuel van Leeuwen

Hat, Alberta on Harvards. His grades were sufficiently high that he was presented an award as 'Best Overall Fighter Pilot' for his Course.

On arrival in London in 1944, Hazelhoff began to worry that the war would be over before he would see action. It seemed that there was an excess of fighter pilots looking for postings! A chance meeting with the then Wing Commander 'Hamish' Mahaddie, who was acting as a 'talent scout' for the Pathfinder Force, changed everything. Mahaddie allowed that if a pilot could pass out of the Mosquito Training Unit at RAF Warboys with an 'Above Average' grade, then he would be considered for the Pathfinders.

Sure enough, after a conversion course of just 30 hours, Erik Hazelhoff achieved the desired 'Above Average' grade, and found himself posted to No 139 (Jamaica) Squadron at RAF Upwood. Upwood was a pre-war RAF Station and certainly had less spartan facilities than others that were constructed under wartime restrictions. No 139 Squadron proudly carried the name 'Jamaica' thanks to the sterling efforts of that

island in raising enough cash to 'purchase' no less than 12 bomber aircraft. Its motto, *Si placet necamus* ('*We destroy at will*') was singularly appropriate for a premier bomber squadron in the Pathfinder Force. Becoming the second RAF unit to convert to the new de Havilland Mosquito (in its first bomber version, the B.Mk IV) in September, 1942, the Squadron became one of the last operators of the type in postwar Bomber Command, when they relinquished the ultimate bomber version, the Mosquito B.35, for the new fast jet bomber, the Canberra, in 1953. When Erik Hazelhoff joined 139 Squadron they were equipped with a mix of B.XVI and the Canadian-built B.XX Mosquitoes.

On joining, he found many characters, such as the one-legged navigator, Johnny Day, DFC, but he crewed up, initially, with Flt Lt Ray Snelling, DFC for first his first mission - to Hamburg. The pair completed 10 missions

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Flypast by The Fokker Four on April 3rd 2017
Courtesy of EHR Foundation
Photography: Samuel van Leeuwen

The 'Fokker Four' fly the 'missing man' formation

Credit: EHR Foundation/Maurice Castellon



together, usually in 'Q-Queenie', but then Erik fell in with an old school friend and now navigator, Ben Hein, and they became the first, and only, all-Dutch Pathfinder crew; their first trip together, on the 12/13th October, 1944 was to Berlin. They went on to finish the war together, with Erik having completed 72 missions, no less than 25 of them over the 'Big City'. They earned both Dutch and British DFCs; Hazelhoff had earlier been knighted by Queen Wilhelmina, having been awarded the Netherlands Medal of Honour (the Dutch equivalent of the VC).

Erik Hazelhoff had always wanted to write, and at a London party hosted by Colonel Elliott Roosevelt, USAAC – the President's son and another great admirer of the de Havilland Mosquito – he had met William Hearst, the American publisher. Hearst was about to leave for New York, and Erik had persuaded him to take back a short story he had written about a raid on Berlin. It was published in the September, 1945 issue of 'Cosmopolitan' magazine under the title, 'Mosquitoes Sting at Night'. No less a person

than Len Deighton would later describe Erik as having "a fierce and fluent talent for writing".

Post-war, Erik Hazelhoff-Rolfzema became many things – an oil prospector, an aide to Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, a Vice President of NBC – but above all he was an author. Both prolific and talented, his work 'Soldier of Orange' was filmed in 1977 with Rutger Hauer playing the part of Erik, and in 2010 this book became the inspiration for the musical which is running to this day.

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Erik Hazelhoff-Roelfzema died in Hawai'i on 26th September, 2007, aged 90. However, his legacy lives on through the work of the Erik Hazelhoff Roelfzema Foundation, ably led by his widow, Karin Hazelhoff-Roelfzema, which encourages literary efforts in the Netherlands and awards bi-annual prizes.

The flyovers at Valkenburgh, and the 'missing man' formation flown by the 'Fokker Four', only served to highlight the career of a most distinguished Mosquito pilot, and wearer of the golden wings of the Royal Air Force's Pathfinder Force.

Erik Hazelhoff-Roelfzema – a life, well lived.

www.erikhazelhoffroelfzema.com

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