

THE BRAKKENSTEIN CRASH 6 OCTOBER 1944 – MONUMENT UNVEILED 6 OCTOBER 2012

The 20-year old Aucklander, Warrant Officer Ivan William CAIN, crashed his Typhoon plane in Brakkenstein, south of Nijmegen, the Netherlands, on 6 October 1944. He died under heroic circumstances by staying with his disabled Typhoon to avoid a densely populated area. His heroism has finally been recognised on 6 October 2012 when the New Zealand Ambassador to the Netherlands, HE George Troup unveiled a monument close to Cain's crash site. Five members of Cain's family attended the unveiling.



NZ Ambassador HE George Troup placing a wreath on behalf of NZ Government at the monument

Warrant Officer Cain was one of the many New Zealanders who died while serving with the RNZAF and Allied Air Services during World War 2. On his last sortie with the 175 RAF squadron, he was part of an armed reconnaissance flight over the Arnhem-Cleve-Goch-Geldern area and was hit by flak during a rocket projectile attack against barges on the Rhine at Emmerich, just inside the German border. He tried to get back to his base at Volkel airport but did not succeed, and crashed in an open field in the village of Brakkenstein, narrowly avoiding the many onlookers who had fled from Nijmegen where heavy fighting was still in progress. He died instantly and is buried in the Jonkerbos War Cemetery, plot 17-C-3, at Nijmegen.

Warrant Officer Ivan William CAIN was born in Auckland on 24 November 1923, the son of William CAIN and Isabella Florence CAIN née HOLLOWAY. He attended Seddon Memorial Technical College, now part of the Auckland University of Technology. His big hobby was building model aeroplanes, and as a 12-year old, he showed his model to the NZ aviator Jean Batten when she had just arrived in Auckland from her record-breaking London-NZ flight in October 1936. She was "amazed with the lad's skill, attention to detail and powers of observation" and said "This boy tells me in his letter that he is going to be an aviator".

He enlisted with the RNZAF on 7 March 1942. After training in New Zealand and in Canada, he joined the RAF in June 1943 where he learnt to fly Hurricanes and eventually Typhoons, a difficult plane to fly, and became a warrant officer in June 1944. With the 175 squadron, he took part in the liberation of Europe, until that fatal flight on 6 October 1944.



W/O Cain in Typhoon cockpit, wearing Warrant Officer insignia on RH sleeve, June 1944

Dr Nick Lambrechtsen of Wellington, NZ, read about Cain's heroism when he was given a copy of the leaflet "De Vliegende Hollander" in 2005 while in the Netherlands. It contained an article about a NZ Typhoon pilot who "saved the lives of hundreds of Dutch people by willingly and knowingly crashing his plane in an open field, in order to save the crowd that was standing in the streets". Dr Lambrechtsen was fascinated by this story because he had already lived in NZ for 47 years, and as a proud NZer wanted to find out who this pilot was and whether his heroism had been recognised. When he found that this had not been recognised, he decided to do something about it. He was motivated to do so, because he had lived to the west of Nijmegen during the war, and on 20 September 1944, an English Spitfire pilot nearly crashed on his house. This pilot P/O John Robert Brodby also died, taking the lives of 3 civilians with him. Dr Lambrechtsen had been able to establish the identity of P/O Brodby and as a token of gratitude to the English pilot, decided to research this NZ pilot.

It took Dr Lambrechtsen seven years of research in New Zealand, with a team of helpers and their world-wide contacts, and the "Cain Monument Campaign" committee in the Netherlands, to establish the name of the pilot

and to confirm with the help of five eyewitnesses and five written records the heroism of W/O Cain. Mr Arjen Kuiken of this committee found that one of the rocket projectiles from W/O Cain's Typhoon had killed a Dutch civilian, when Cain fired off those projectiles too late, i.e. not into the nearby Reichswald. This civilian was the widow Elizabeth Swertz-Ekker who left three young daughters. Two of the daughters also attended the unveiling of Cain's monument which has an additional plaque, commemorating their mother's death. The families of the pilot and of the civilian victim met each other at the unveiling ceremony, and were able to reconcile their different experiences of this wartime accident.



The monument with its two plaques: top one for W/O Cain; lower one for Elizabeth Swertz-Ekker

The monument is thus rather unique: it is the only one within the boundaries of the City of Nijmegen which commemorates a NZer, and it also commemorates the Dutch civilian victim. Dr Lambrechtsen thanks the City of Nijmegen for allowing the monument to be erected on its land.



Close up of plaque for W/O Ivan William Cain



Close up of plaque for Elizabeth Swertz-Ekker

The monument is located on the corner of the Heyendaalseweg and the Pastoor Wichersstraat, in Brakkenstein. It has been adopted by the nearby Tarcisiusschool, without whose wide-ranging assistance and support, the monument would never have eventuated. The school organised a sponsored walk which collected 1,500 euros towards the erection and maintenance of the monument. W/O Cain who was a Presbyterian, was given absolution by a local priest who thought he might be a Catholic. Now his monument is being cared for by this Catholic school, so that one could speak of a truly ecumenical effort.

The monument has been recorded in the Dutch database of "Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei", see http://www.4en5mei.nl/herinneren/oorlogsmonumenten/monumenten_zoeken/oorlogsmonument/3737

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