

Robbert Cohen was born in Rotterdam on July 24, 1922. His father was co-director of a family business in Rotterdam. Robbert was a student of the Rotterdam Lyceum from 1934-1939. In September 1939 he was enrolled at the Technical University of Delft to study technical chemistry. In September 1940 he became a member of the Delft Student Corps.

As a result of the German measures against the Jews, he was soon no longer allowed to study. In early June 1941 he walked through Delft when he met a group of young men, including a friend of his from the Rotterdam Lyceum. They asked him why he was so gloomy, and Rob told him that he was no longer allowed to study. Then one of the others asked him why he wasn't going to England? "We have a two-person canoe for you." Rob thought it was a good idea, but he had to find a second man who could row well. That second man was found within days. It was Coen de Jongh, an experienced rower, who was wanted by the Germans for resistance work.

The folding canoe, packed in three bags and with an extra sail, was brought from Scheveningen via the Kaag to Katwijk. Katwijk was chosen because the coast guard was weak there. On the night of 19/20 June 1941, Rob and Coen assembled the canoe and left via the beach with a compass, binoculars, some food and a thermos of water. Compass heading: West. 50 hours later they were picked up by a British minesweeper off the coast of Lowestoft in southern England. Rob and Coen were awarded the Bronze Cross for this crossing (Royal Decree of 6 November 1941).

Like all England sailors, Rob and Coen were interrogated by the English for a few days and then released. They had to report to the Dutch authorities and then had tea with Queen Wilhelmina. On June 27, 1941 Rob received an English Identity Card.

July 14, 1941 Rob was conscripted into the Dutch Army. At his own request, on 20 August 1941, he is seconded to the RAFVR and was trained as a pilot with a number of other Dutch nationals. First was basic training and then Elementary Flying School. On April 6, 1942, Rob went to Canada for further training. In August 1942 he received his Wings and became a sergeant aviator.

In October 1942 he was back in England for further training on twin-engine aircraft. In May 1943 he was sworn in as a reserve 2nd Lieutenant aviator. In late 1943 he was looking for a position with an operational squadron. He came into contact with 613 Sqn. (City of Manchester), converting from single-engine Mustangs to twin-engine Mosquitos. They could use a pilot with two-engine experience and in October 1943 Rob started at 613, location Lasham (Hamps) SW of London.

The first operational action from 613 took place on December 31, 1943 and Rob's first operational flight was on January 4, 1944. Rob flew from January 1944 to the moment he was shot down, on August 11, 1944. During that period, he had 51 operational flights. was hit at least ten times by enemy fire, twice such that he had to fly back and land on one engine.

In the meantime, he spent a lot of time with acquaintances in London. He described him as rather closed and fixated on flying and attacking German targets. It was known in the Squadron that he occasionally cursed the Germans in German over the on-board radio.

In April 1944, he and five other crews were selected to carry out the attack on the Kleykamp building in The Hague, where the Central Population Register was located. Because the duplicates of the Dutch identity cards were kept here, it was destroyed at the request of the Dutch resistance. A model was made of the building. When, on the morning of the attack, the commander called the pilots together for the briefing, he said to Rob, "You will recognize this." That was indeed the case. It was the first time that Rob flew over the Netherlands in daylight. The attack was a success, but Rob

was unlucky that his bombs did not come off.

May 1944 he was promoted to temporary reserve First Lieutenant. After the invasion in June 1944, he flew several missions in support of the ground forces. On the night of July 15, 1944, he flew over France when he saw lights on the ground near Fontainebleau. He went there and discovered a railway yard with trains with fuel. He bombed and fired at those trains for 45 minutes. Finally, 15 wagons were on fire, but then he ran out of ammunition and had to return to base. He has tried to alert other aircraft in the area to this goal, but without success. Bombers finished the job the next day. It turned out to be four trains with fuel. For this promotion Rob received the Distinguished Flying Cross ("Immediate award") and his navigator received the Distinguished Flying Medal. Since Rob was already over his tax for an operational tour, he would have to leave 613. He would temporarily join KLM for the line from England to Lisbon. But he asked and was assured that, after that six-month rest period, he could return to 613 in the same rank and seniority.

On the night of August 11, 1944, he took off for what would be the penultimate flight of his tour of operations. Assignment: "To attack enemy communications in France". He attacked a train near Breux s / Avre. In addition, he was hit by the anti-aircraft fire in such a way that he crashed on the spot. Both Rob and his navigator died instantly. Rob was 22 at the time, his navigator was 21 years old. They were initially buried in Breux s / Avre. Later Rob was transferred to the Dutch Field of Honor Orry-la-Ville near Senlis.

Source: Family Fontijn in Zeist, June 19, 2015

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