

2nd Lt Gerrit Jan Kuenen
AKA - Gerrit Koops, Gerrit
Boerendams
Code Name - Football, Willem
Kruis van Verdienste (KV)

Gerrit was born on 13 January 1918 in Aalten, Eastern Netherlands, the eldest son of Gerrit Jan Engelbertus Hendrikus Kuenen and Johanna Theodora Roelof Waard.

Educated at Haarlem Technical School, Gerrit was employed as an engineering draughtsman in Beverwijk when, in 1938, he was called up for military service. A knee injury allowed him to retire as a corporal gunsmith and when war was declared he was working as a mechanical engineer at the Hoogovens in IJmuiden.



Gerrit tried to escape Holland via several failed ventures - a plan to steal a Messerschmitt in Bergen and an aborted attempt to sail from Wijk aan Zee. He was arrested in May 1940 for interrogation, and on release decided he needed to escape to serve in the UK. Gerrit reached England in late 1942 via France, Belgium, Spain, Curacao, USA and Canada, spending periods incarcerated in Vichy France and Spain, joining the Dutch Army on arrival as a 2nd Lt. He was quickly recruited by SOE.

Gerrit completed clandestine warfare training, including parachute training, sabotage and specialist radio ground to air communication. Several attempts were made to infiltrate Gerrit, both by sea and air, with no success. His final mission was to proceed to Holland for the purpose of instructing members of a new organization in sabotage and the general use of explosives and incendiaries. Given his orders, he waited at Gaynes Hall, Huntingdon for his flight.

At 23:34 on 31 May 1944, Gerrit and one other Agent departed RAF Tempsford, Bedfordshire in Hudson III V9155 (MA-Q) on "Operation Beziquez", aiming for a drop zone to the East of Eindhoven. Given the number of Dutch Agents that had been captured on landing, the two men were to be dropped blind.

Due to a Navigation error, the aircraft strayed over the heavily anti-aircraft defended Luftwaffe fighter base at Gilze-Rijen. Hit by flak, at 01:20 the aircraft crashed just outside the airfield near the water tower at Gilze, 10km East of Breda. All but the Air Gunner were killed instantly and, on the orders of the German authorities, were buried the following day in a communal grave in the Roman Catholic Cemetery at Gilze-Rijen. In September 1945, Gerrit was reburied with full military honours in Beverwijk (Duinrust) General Cemetery, Netherlands

Also killed : FL Warren Macaulay Hale RCAF (Pilot); FO John Gall RNZAF DFC (Nav); FO Michael Henry Hughes (AG); FO Arthur George Maskall DFM (WOp/AG); 2nd Lt Cornelis Martinus Dekkers (Agent)

Gerrit is buried in Beverwijk (Duinrust) General Cemetery, Netherlands

Gerrit is commemorated on Wall Panel 195

Photo Source: oorlogsgravenstichting.nl