

Chapter 11.

The Discovery.

A group of workmen were busy excavating the foundations for a service road to a newly built Domestic Waste Incinerator Plant near Fléville in eastern France. It was quite by chance that one of these workmen commented on the strong smell of petrol coming from beneath the excavation. He was so sure of his conviction he decided to bring this unusual occurrence to the attention of his Foreman. The Foreman, deciding to humour this man, followed him back to the area of emission and when he too thought he could detect the aroma of petrol, he decided to dig a little deeper. This action was to uncover solid evidence in the form of metallic material that resembled the cladding used for the construction of wings and fuselage of aircraft. This material could only have come from a crashed aircraft that had buried itself in the boggy type land on which the road was being built. Furthermore, it could only have been a second world war aircraft. The deeper the excavation the more certain it became that this was indeed an aircraft of some unknown type and nationality. The Foreman fearing there might be other than just metal debris immediately reported the find to his superiors, the local press also got a hold on the story and duly printed an article describing the event in some detail.

On the 24th July 1997 the French newspaper "*L'est Republicain*." Printed a front page article describing the event in detail. The headline read "*Le décombres d'un Avion était ce jour trouvé dans Fléville*". The debris of a plane was this day found in Fléville.

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On the 17th August 1977 I received a telephone call from Squadron Leader Jack Harris, Secretary of our 550 Squadron Association. He informed me that he had received a letter from a Monsieur Patrick BAUMANN who had been trying to trace any surviving members of the crew of Lancaster Bomber RA502 Z..Zebra of 550 Squadron stationed at North Killingholme in Lincolnshire.

Patrick, an amateur historian who's interests were, among other things, that of World War Two aircraft that had crashed on French soil during those war years with Germany. Because of his vast knowledge and experience of this subject, Patrick was invited to take part in the investigation of an aircraft that had been discovered quite by accident during the excavations for a new access road..

A copy of the letter sent by Patrick Baumann to Sqd/Ld Jack Harris. Secretary of the 550 Squadron Association.

The letter is written in English and I include that letter as it was written with the exception of the addresses and telephone number:

Quote:

Dear Sir.

In Nancy, in the east of France, road works were made, there debris of a Lancaster have been found. Thanks to me archives I think it is a plane from 550 Squadron the RA502.

This Lancaster is crashed in Fléville on the 1st February 1945. Two members of the aircrew were reported missing. But no tracks of human bones were found in the wreck. We would try to have contact with the survivors of this plane so could you please help us in our search.

The debris of the Lancaster will be exhibit in the Air Museum of Nancy which has collect about 3 ton metal debris from the plane.

I give the names of the aircrew.

BAUMANN Patrick.

Unquote.

The letter included a list of names of all our crew and the fact that Andy and Norman were reported missing believed killed and having no known grave.

Jack immediately telephoned me with the news of the discovery and furnished me with the address of Patrick in order that I should get in touch with Patrick as soon as possible. This I did and thus began a series of correspondence that got me involved with the people who excavated the wreck and those that interpreted the finds for what they were worth.

It should be appreciated that when we first got to know of the discovery all the work involved with recovery and the identification of both aircraft and crew who in it had virtually come to a conclusion. We were then only involved with the dedication ceremonies and the memorial to our comrades, so all that

was left was the reports we could contribute to complete the picture of how our Lancaster came to be there in the first place.

Following my first communication with Patrick he wrote back to me almost by return post and the following is a copy of that letter:

*BAUMANN Patrick
5 rue du Colonel
68320 HOLTZWILHR
France.*

Dear Sir

I was very happy when your mail came. The debris of the RA502 Lancaster were found during searching which we made because of a road construction.

Thanks to that we have been looking for and we have found your address.

The remains are washed. We will foresee your visit in November because we need time to prepare your come in France. I have given off the documents to the museum of Nancy. He will give you the last news of the steps about the debris in the next time.

In a Lancaster book, it was a picture of a 170 Squadron Lancaster. It must be the one that collided with yours. I am trying to look for the survivors of this plane, It managed to come back in England in the night of the 2nd February 1945. Could you please send me the story of your mission. The night when you have been shot, (details about the hour and when you left the plane) That would be kind!! It's really important for our search. We are looking for pictures with the Lancaster or crewmembers or other pictures of 550 Squadron with the intention of writing an article for our local newspaper. Thanks for helping us.

Yours sincerely

BAUMANN.

These two letters were to begin a lasting friendship; with not only the authors of the letters, but with many others who were then involved in project.

We the survivors were subsequently presented with a compilation of all the researchers' reports and the reports on the excavation site itself. It was only then that one could appreciate the enormity of the project in identification of both aircraft and the crew of that aircraft.

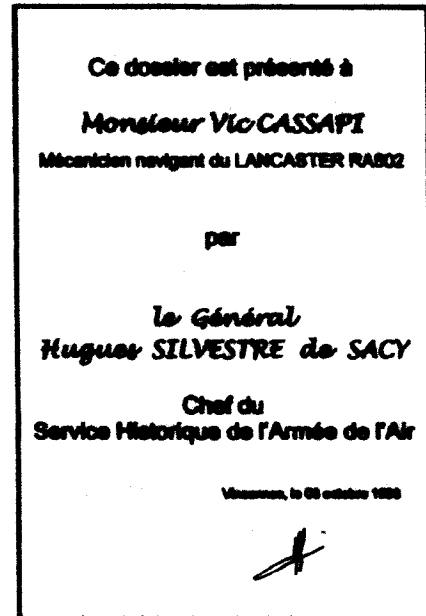
This report was contained in a 70 Page Compilation of Reports compiled by Sergeant Georges-Didier Rohrbacher of the Service Historique De L'Armee De'Air. (The Historical Service of the French Army-Air Force).

The cover page of the document reads

1st 2nd February 1945 \diamond 23rd July 1997
52 years after its fall to earth in Lorraine.
Lancaster RA502 $\langle \diamond \rangle$ Z. Zebra Is found.
The story of the inquiry is exemplary.



Sergent Georges-Didier ROHRBACHER
SERVICE HISTORIQUE DE L'ARMÉE DE L'AIR
- Vincennes -



This Dossier is Presented to
Monsieur. Vic Cassapi
Flight Engineer of Lancaster RA502
by
The General
Hughes SILVESTRE de SACY

It should be noted that although this was a very professionally presented document, it was however written entirely in the French language and my knowledge of French at that time was virtually nil. Consequently this meant I would have to get it translated by third parties. It was far too much to expect friends to tackle it, even if I could find sufficient French speaking friends in the first place. The cost of having it done by a professional was far too expensive, at 5p per word it would have cost in the region £2500.00. With this in mind and armed with certain knowledge of the subject matter, I decided to buy a fairly good computer French to English programme and a good quality French to

English Dictionary and Book on French grammar. In this way I managed to work my way through the document, even though it turned out to be a long and tedious task, Translating to English then back again to French and once again to English. In this way I could just about make sense of the syntax. In the meantime I acquired a good teacher of French and began my study of the French language, but even this was confined to just one hour per week of one to one tuition because good tutors are not cheap. Even so my reading of the language was far better than my ability to listen and comprehend.

The first translation is that of General Hughes Sylvestre de Sacy of the Historic Service of the French Army Air Force who very accurately described the project as exemplary for the way and speed that it was carried out.

Quote:

Dear Mr Cassapi.

In July 1997, thanks to information uncovered by researchers specialising in the investigation of aircraft crashes in France during the Second World War, our service was immediately informed of the chance discovery of aircraft parts during road building work at Fleville-devant-Nancy

At the request of the Nancy Aeronautical Museum, directed by Monsieur Regis MOREAU, the Air force Historical Service immediately launched an inquiry and produced a report entitled

1st -2nd February 1945- 23rd July 1997- 52 Years after crashing in Lorraine, Lancaster RA502, BQ. Z.Zebra is discovered- The account of an exemplary inquiry

This report summarises all the different studies of documents and investigations on the ground which led to the formal identification shortly after the discovery of Lancaster RA 502, BQ, Z.Zebra of 550 Squadron Royal Air Force, which crashed on the 1st February 1945 after collision with Lancaster NG202 of 170 Squadron.

It would not have been possible to put together this summary without the voluntary efforts of the researchers mentioned above and without the assistance of the local authorities in the east of France. This inquiry has proved exemplary for the collaboration between all parties involved, all the good will be demonstrated by the speed in which the results were obtained.

It is therefore in the name of those who have contributed that I am sending you this copy of the 70-page report which I trust you will be able to have translated into English.

I send it to you with great pleasure but also with respect, as you were part of the crew of Lancaster RA502. I am particularly sensitive to this type of inquiry and the need to honour and commemorate our allies who came to fight and fall for our freedom.

Unfortunately for professional reasons it will not be possible for me to come to Fleville on the 24th October 1998 but all the same I am sure that this ceremony of remembrance for Sergeants Norman Tinsley, Andrew James and Virgil Fernquist will be exemplary and moving on many counts.

Sergeant Georges-Didier Rohbacher with whom you have already had contact and who is the co-ordinator of this inquiry will be sure to give me a faithful account of the ceremony.

Yours sincerely

Signed: Hughes SYLVESTRE de SACY.

Unquote.

The first inclusion in the Document was a foreword by the General and translate as follows:

Quote

Aircraft that have crashed on French soil during the second world war are of interest to a number researchers who are now available to assist the Historical Service of the Army Airforce.

Sometimes , questions emanate equally from the families of airmen who were reported missing more than 50 years in the past. Consequently, archives are now freely accessible to view by next of kin or close relatives

In May 1995 for example, a request by the family of McAnally who are now resident in the United States was made to the Historic Service of the Army Airforce. This resulted in the placement of advertisements in a number of Newspapers of eastern France for any information with regard to the disappearance of an American B.24. Liberator Bomber and its 10 member crew.

Ultimately the approach was a "bottle in the sea" method, while the archives of the American, Germans or French, were totally devoid of information

The result of this action was disappointing, after sifting over a hundred persons statements in writing of what they had been able to see during this period, or what they had been able to hear, or mouth-to-mouth, ear-to-ear, and or local rumour

Among all these statements none gave any tangle evidence that might restore any hope for the family of MacAnally. However, other aircraft crashes such as

the one on Fleville-devant-Nancy was well recorded. Unfortunately, with the time available, the collected information were then, as for most of these statements were concerned, too uncertain for determination by detailed archaeological investigation.

Recently, and by chance the fragments of a aircraft were discovered during the construction of a new road. This plane was rapidly identified by both amateur and professional workers in this field. This work involved much documentary research and analysis to arrive at a rapid and efficient conclusion.

I propose that with regard to this file, you make all effort to uncover the details of this investigation. It is apparent that two English aviators have fallen with their plane to the ground in France during a night of war, and that a third aviator has equally been killed.

I wish that in future, they do not disappear from our memory a second time and that of the collective memory of their comrades and survivants who would wish to equally honour them in the presence of their families that would wish it. But also the youth generations of our country, to which it is necessary to remind them of the sacrifices consented by their Elders.

I hold to thank cordially, all those that have had heart to work for this indispensable duty of memoir.

Signed

General Hughes Silvestre de Sacy

Although the extracted translations cannot be guaranteed accurate from a word for word point of view, I have been reliably informed by volunteer proof readers that the work hereafter is a factual account of what is written in the French language

The Document describes the events that took place to identify the type, nationality and were possible, any surviving members of the crew of the aircraft.

Seargent ROHRBACHER was instructed by the General to co-ordinate the actions of the various workers and researchers and subsequently to produced a final report.

It can be seen that the first translation of the personal letter from the General that was included in the Dossier. It clearly emphasises the genuine interest and regard of the General for the identification of the aircraft and those who flew in it. He is particular in his desire to recognise and honour those who died as a result of the incident.

However, the task of identifying the crew of the discovery was only possible when the identification of the aircraft itself had been established. This was no easy task.

Because much of the debris had been cleaned up by scrap merchants almost immediately after the crash. Because the metal material from which the wings and fuselage was made was quite valuable and these merchants would be sure to get in early before the authorities took charge.

The field where the crash took place was in fact pasture land and normally grazed by cattle. As these cattle were normally rounded up at the end of each day they would not be present when the crash took place. Consequently what was left of the material was gathered up by the farmer and dumped in a hole nearby. Thus enabling the cattle to feed on the pasture.

Certain people did report the crash but could not accurately pin point the site. Consequently their evidence was logged but no further action taken.

I only mention this to high-light the added difficulties the researchers had in identifying the aircraft.

After it was established that the find was indeed a Second World War aircraft of both unknown type and nationality, the town Council of Fléville-devant-Nancy took charge of the proceedings from then onwards. The town Council informed the following organisations:

- The local Police.
- Conservateur à la Direction des Regionale des Affaires Culturelles. Service Reginale de L'Archaeologie.
- Mon Regis MOREAU Conservateur Musee de Aeroautique du Nancy-Essey
- ARMEE DE L'AIR HISTORIQUE. CHATEAU DE VINCENNES. B.P. 110-00481 ARMEES. Paris.

Because of French Television and Press coverage; the local Police were called in to keep away local sightseers in case there should be danger from unexploded bombs or other dangerous ammunition. It was at this stage that Mon MOREAU was informed. Mon MOREAU, an expert in Second World War aircraft quickly established that the discovery was indeed a Second World War aircraft and until further investigations was carried out, recommended that all road works should be halted. In the meantime the local Press continued to publish articles on the discovery.

I later learned that the Mayor of Fleville was planning to erect a monument in

memory of our two lost comrades Andy and Norman. We also discovered the dedication was to include Sgt Virgil Fernquist who was the rear gunner of the other aircraft involved in the collision. Virgil was killed when our propellers sliced through his rear gun turret.

translation of headlines)

The Lancaster of Fléville
An Exposition Project

The Curator of the Museum of Aeronautics
is going to sort
out what has been recovered and ask for
information
from the archives of the Royal Air Force.

On Thursday the 25th July 1997 L'EST REPUBLICAIN published an article entitled "The Debris of a Wartime Aeroplane was today discovered in Fleville" It went on to describe how the discovery was made during the excavations for a new access road for a newly built Incinerator Factory. The site of the debris is situated near the cross roads roundabout that passes over the turnpike of the A30.

On Thursday the 23rd July 1997 L'EST REPUBLICAIN published an article entitled "The Debris of a Wartime Aeroplane was today discovered in Fleville" It went on to describe how the discovery was made during the excavations for a new access road for a newly built Incinerator Factory. The site of the debris is situated near the cross roads roundabout that passes over the turnpike of the A30.

Because of the interest stirred up by the various press releases, a public warning was issued relating to the fact that a second world war aeroplane had crashed there and because of the danger of the possible presence of live ammunition or possibly of the presence of unexploded bombs, the police were employed to keep the general public at a safe distance. Furthermore, road work on the site was suspended pending the results of the ongoing investigative explorations.

July 23 1997: Identification of the Type and Nationality of the Aircraft

At that time, the debris that had been recovered gave no indication of the type or nationality of the aircraft and so, on the 25th July 1997 just two days after the discovery, excavations under the direction Jean-Pierre LEGENDRE, archaeologist of the Reginale Affaires des Culturelles and assisted by experts from the Aeronautical Museum of Nancy were continued.

L'Est Républicain
25/07/97
FAITS DIVERS
Lancaster de Fléville:
une exposition en projet
Le conservateur du musée de l'aéronautique va tenter ce qui a été récupéré et demander des renseignements aux archives de la Royal Air Force.

Les débris du bombardier bi-torpilleur Lancaster ont été trouvés le jour jeudi à Fléville sur le chantier de la future passerelle de l'usine d'incinération qui finalement remplacera l'ancien complexe de cuisine. Toutes les pièces récupérées ont été transportées au musée de l'aéronautique d'Épinal. Les experts ont été très étonnés et surpris. « Nous allons également réaliser les investigations prévues sur certains éléments », souligne Jean-Pierre Legendre, conservateur du musée. « Ce qu'il y de sûr », a-t-il ajouté, « c'est que nous sommes tombés sur le crash

de l'appareil. Nous sommes arrivés en vitesse décollée et des moteurs. Mais tout d'un coup a été totalement défilé et s'est enfui très profondément dans le sol ». **Le mousqueton du parachute** L'inventaire de ces vestiges est demandé beaucoup de temps mais M. Legendre, avec la passion et l'opiniâtreté qu'on lui connaît, ne recule jamais devant une tâche. Il va également s'adresser au service des archives de la Royal Air Force pour reconstituer

l'histoire du bombardier et connaître son dernier plan de vol. Et il envisage de présenter ultérieurement une exposition sur cette découverte. Un détail intéressant a été en tout cas relevé. Sur l'un des parachutes retrouvés, était fixé le mousqueton qui, accroché à une liasse, est indispensable pour ouvrir l'appareil. Ce qui laisse supposer que les aviateurs, à la suite d'un panne ou d'un autre grave défaut causé par un tir de la défense anti-aérienne, se préparaient à abandonner le bombardier. Gérard GILBERT





Jean-Pierre LEGENDRE.
Principal Site Archaeologist.

So much debris but so little
help with the identification
of the aircraft

The heavy equipment used
to excavate the debris
Mechanical Digger



Up until that time, the debris that had been recovered gave no indication of the type or nationality of the aircraft and so, on the 25th July 1997 just two days after the discovery, excavations under the direction Jean-Pierre LEGENDRE, archaeologist of the Reginale Affaires des Culturelles and assisted by experts from the Aeronautical Museum of Nancy were continued.

At that time a large quantity of aircraft debris was unearthed. This debris consisted of engine parts such as pistons and cylinders, propeller blades and hubs, two under carriage hydraulic legs, a number of nitrogen and oxygen bottles, 2 parachutes together with some pieces of the fuselage skin etc. Two of the recovered portions of the fuselage however, were to play an important role in the subsequent identification of our aircraft.

The first was a metal plate approximately 90 x 50 cm, painted black with the Manufacturers Serial Number "No.683" engraved on it. The inscriptions on this plaque allowed Monsieur MOREAU the curator of the Musee de Aeronautique Nancy-Essey to determine the type and nationality of the aircraft. Type No 683 illustrated on the two plates identified the debris came from a four engined bomber and probably a Lancaster. The nomenclature obtained from the Society Britannia indicated it to be from AVRO, manufacturers of the Lancaster Bomber.

During the last world war the Serial No 683 engraved on both of these plates, without doubt refers to the manufacturer AVRO whom it was thought, may be able to identify conclusively which aircraft it actually was. The inscription serial No.78701 also engraved on both pieces possibly referred to the manufacturers reference, though it was not possible to determine if it would help to identify the actual aircraft itself.



Mon. Moreau.

"left". seen here attempting to identify a small piece of debris

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A second piece of debris of similar dimensions and painted black also was found in almost the same place. This had the letters RA painted on in red paint, the dimension of these letters was 21 cm x 14 cm. These two letters must have referred to part of the serial number designated to each individual aircraft as it was the normal procedure to paint serial letters and numbers on the fuselage of all British Aircraft. Unfortunately, these two letters "RA" on there own were inconclusive without the benefit of knowing the numbers that usually follow.

No evidence of human remains or objects of personal equipment were found during these excavations. There was however a small piece of cloth



which could have come from a uniform.

The remains of two parachutes were also found. The danger of ammunitions having been averted, six machine guns were rapidly identified as 303 calibre Browning machine guns, there were also some cartridges contained in their belts, but thankfully no bombs were there to be found.

Monsieur Johnn-Pierre NICLOT was involved with the general history of all fallen aircraft, Paul BASSET specialised more in fallen British Bomber Command aircraft whereas Monsieur Patrick Baumann an amateur historian of world war two aircraft also gave valuable advice and eventually successfully traced the crew of the aircraft.

Equally fruitful information was conveyed by telephonics from the Museum of Aeronautics of Nancy-Essey via Monsieur LIGNIER and Monsieur Jean-Pierre LEGENDRE who were responsible for the excavation of the archaeological site, a responsibility they shared with Monsieur John-Marie GIRARD, Mayor of Fleville-devant-Nancy. It was pertinent that the debris

recovered could help researchers in the identification of the aircraft.

The following is a translation of the report submitted by John-Paul BASSET.

Quote:

A Plane Falls on Fléville-devant Nancy.
Strong Assumption for a
Lancaster Bomber.

The first indication of the discovery of this aircraft was from a telephone conversation with Georges-Didier ROHRBACHER of the Service Historique Armée de L'Air. He had informed me of the discovery of a wreck during the course of road works in the region of Nancy. It was followed by a Fax giving me the coordinates of persons participating who had detailed information. This was later confirmed by Patrick BAUMANN during the evening when we met.

The discovery of the remains of this aircraft was made on the 23rd July 1997 by workmen constructing a new road for the Meurthe et Moselle. The excavation was designed to establish if there was any remains of the crew still lying there and it was assured that there were not.

The investigation with regard to the possible presence of bombs was left under the direction of Jean-Pierre LEGENDRE de la Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles de Lorraine and in the presence of Mon. MOREAU. Conservateur du Musée de l'Aéronautique de Nancy-Essey. During the search, the police provided security for the civilian population, while a team of researchers carried out their investigations.

Mon. MOREAU and Mon. LIGNIER

took on responsibility for communications and I was informed of a number of important discoveries.

These discoveries included

- * 6 Machine-guns 303 calibre
- * A plaque with the code number 683
- * A piece of the fuselage with the letters "RA" painted red
- * 2 Parachutes
- * A number of unidentified bottles

The calibre and type of arms recovered indicated to us that these were of British origin and knowing that the Lancaster is typical, AVRO 683 would indicate the strong possibility of a Lancaster.

The letters "RA" are the first two letters of a serial number of a series. There were 121 Lancaster's ordered from Metropolitan Vickers that were delivered the Royal Air Force between December 1944 and April 1945 and included the following groups:

RA500-RA547-RA507-RA560-RA623-RA627-RA787 and RA806.

All these were the Lancaster Mk.1. type.

Jean-Pierre NICLOT of Perray in Yvelines to whom I had communicated information by telephone, provided a list of twelve possible aircraft that could be considered. A study of plans of their flight path and objectives, from the position of their reported falls, given by files of reported losses of "Bomber Command Losses Records" and the publication inclusion discovered by Patrick BAUMANN in the "Lancaster at War" recording that RA502 had been abandoned in flight in the region of CHATEAU-SALINS after a collision with the Lancaster NG202 allows me to establish a list of survivors. RA 502 was reported to be abandoned in flight in the region of CHATEAU-SALINS after a collision with the Lancaster NG202. This

allows me to establish a list of survivors

Following a collision with NG202, Lancaster Bomber RA502. of 550 Sqd was abandoned on the 1-2/02/45 during a mission on Ludwigshafen (Lancaster File Air Britain) in the region of Chateau-Salins. Two members of the crew were killed. RA502 crashed in a field near to Fleville.

The list continues:

RA508.

106 Sqd lost 12/03/45 mission on Dortmund. Plan of flight to the north of Belgium.

RA515.

103 Sqd lost 23-24/02/45 mission on Pforzheim. Route to North of Nancy, 6 killed. 1 survivor

RA516.

576.Sqd lost 21-22/02/45 mission on Duisbourg. Went down in the region of Eindhoven.

RA517

189 Sqd. lost 14-15/02/45 mission on Rositz. Went down in the region Altenborg

RA523

101.Sqd lost 23-24/02/45 mission on Pforzheim. Went down over the target

RA524.

460.Sqd. lost 02/03/45 on mission to Cologne. Buried in the cemetery of Henri-Chapel Belgium, route to the north of France.

RA526.

153 Sqd. Went down in the sea 12/03/45

RA531.

49 Sqd. lost 8-9/04/45 mission on Lutzkendorf. Road to the North.

RA546.

227.Sqd .Lost 14-15/03/45 mission on Lutzkendorf in the region of Nancy. Pilot killed

RA560.

61 Sqd. lost 20 - 21/03/45 mission

Bohien. En route to the North.

RA564.

75 Sqd. lost 21/03/45 mission Munster. Went down after reaching objective.

Of these twelve aircraft only RA502 and RA515 closely correspond. However, a telephone conversation with Mrs. VANDEVILLE of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission of BEAURAINS, Pas de Calais, informed me that two members of the crew of RA502 died in the crash and had no known grave: whereas the entire crew of RA515 were buried in a public cemetery in Durenbach, Germany.

The official report from Squadron's 170 and 550 states that NG.202 took off at 15.57hrs on a bombing mission. It arrived at the target at 19.54 hrs and returned to base at 22.54 hrs, In the course of the return flight, NG.202 was involved in a collision incurring severe damage to the tail section and killing the rear gunner. RA502: took off 15.56hrs on a similar mission to Ludwigshafen and of the crew that returned, five baled out and landed in allied territory, having abandoned their aircraft after a collision in the region of the objective. As for the two members of the crew unaccounted for, Sergeant's JAMES and TINSLEY, it appears that they did not evacuate the aircraft since two parachutes have been recovered. As no human remains have been recovered during the course of the excavation and unless otherwise indicated, they must be found in an area not yet discovered.

As many as 55000 aviators of Bomber Command have fallen during the Second World War and they have no known graves. It should be considered that they now rest in the zone where their aircraft have crashed.

Signed.

John-Paul BASSET

Unquote.

Quote:

The Lancaster at World War.

In a book by Brian Goulding & Mike Garbett , "The Lancaster at World War" a photograph was published showing serious damage to the rear of a Lancaster after returning from operations.

While on the return journey from a bombing raid on Ludwigshafen the Lancaster NG202 of 170 Squadron and based at Hemswell in Lincolnshire, collided with another aircraft. Sadly the rear gunner Sergeant V.J Fernquist was mortally wounded. With two rudders severely damaged the pilot F/O Dixie struggled to return the aircraft to base. Although it was not then proven, it seemed certain that the other aircraft involved was a Lancaster from 550 Squadron flown by F/O Lohrey.

Following a violent collision with another unidentified aircraft, F/O Lohrey and four members of his crew were obliged to abandon their Lancaster RA502 over France. The Lancaster of F/O Lohrey received the greatest damage with the loss of three engines disabled and damage to the wing and fuselage surfaces.

F/O Dixie received a well deserved DFC for getting his aircraft and crew safely back to base and he and his crew completed their tour of operations.

The story given in the newspapers regarding the Units to which these two Lancaster's belonged, gave cause to fear that the version given was true, thus the Operations Records Book of 170 Squadron, the newspaper group agree that this was NG201 and is mentioned

later, "Aircraft NG202 with F/O Dixie on board reported a collision with another Lancaster while returning from operations over Germany. The rear Gunner Sergeant V.J.Fernquist was killed during this collision."

The Operations Record Book of 550 Squadron listed F/O Lohrey and his crew reported missing on operations. Later it was it recorded that F/O Lohrey and four members of his crew were forced to bail out over allied territory due to the severe damage caused by the collision and were now safe and well. The cause of the accident is readily understandable, the zone of the accident however, is difficult to understand, because it would seem unlikely that with only one engine F/O Lohrey could cover the 200 kilometres from Ludwigshaven to Fléville.

The version given by a bulletin of information dated the 9 February 1945, emanating from 550 Squadron records, that describes a collision that took place over the target is therefore difficult to understand.

F/O Lohrey and 4 members of his crew, Sergeant Westhorpe, Navigator, Sergeant Anderson, Bombaimer, Sergeant Cassapi, Flight Engineer, and Sergeant Jarnell, rear gunner successfully abandoned the aircraft by parachute.



Unfortunately Sergeant James and Sergeant Tinsley did not appear to have successfully evacuated the aircraft and it is feared that they fell with the plane.

The researchers who were involved with this project were most particular to pay high regard for any evidence of the remains of Sergeant's James and Tinsley.

Unquote.

Document goes on to describe how the two parachutes that were recovered at the site re-inforces an argument in favour of our crew members going down with the aircraft..

Quote:

The two parachutes found. Reinforce the hypothesis.

Even though it is not certain what happened to these two airmen it is significant that two parachutes were recovered on the 25 July 1997. The presence of the snap links on one of the parachutes may well have indicated that the two airmen were in a position to bale out, because the snap links are an integral part of the parachute harness and must have been connected to the chest type parachute.

All the evidence recovered from the site of the debris clearly indicates that the plane that came down near Fleville was indisputably RA502. On the 29 July 1997 less than a week after the original request to the Commonwealth Service War Commission that maintains a register of combatants who have been reported missing or lost. It was reported that among the crewmembers of Lancaster RA502, BQ.Z Sergeant's Andrew James and Norman Tinsley were

reported missing and have no known grave. The names of these two airmen are listed in the Runnymede Memorial of those RAF aircrew personnel reported missing while on operations. Even though it is not certain what happened to these two airmen, it is significant that two parachutes were recovered on the 25th July 1997. The presence of the snaplinks on one of the parachutes may well have indicated that the two airmen were in a position to bale out, because the snaplinks are an integral part of the parachute harness and must have been connected to the chest type parachute.

Unquote:

The document goes on to describe the role of the various bodies involved and the law pertaining to these bodies and those responsible for financing the project. It seems that no expense was spared in their efforts to reach a satisfactory conclusion.

Quote.

Analysis of the Pieces Recovered.

The volume of pieces recovered is of little importance when considering the size and mass of an aeroplane of this type. Some very small jagged pieces of the aluminium framework were of no importance but there were some that indisputably confirmed the identity by the presence of the manufacturers plaques still fixed to fuselage skin. This was equally substantiated by the letters RA painted in red paint on another piece of the fuselage skin. The fact that these essential items were discovered must be regarded as quite miraculous.

The engines of some considerable heavy mass of high-density metallic material were disintegrated into many small parts.

This demonstrates the aircraft had struck the ground with considerable force and had not landed on its belly, such as would be the case in a forced or emergency landing. No on-board flying instruments were found and only six of the eight machine guns normally carried were recovered. It is in the opinion of Monsieur MOREAU, that according to which part of the plane struck first, that the turret containing machine guns could have totally disintegrated and been buried deeply in the ground.

No plexiglas from the cockpit, turret or the bombaimers bulb was found.

The parachutes were whole although slightly damaged (holes). The fact that they were open would come about from the force necessary to recover them from the earth and surrounding debris. On one of these parachutes the snaplinks were attached.

There were fragments of cloth, coloured blue/grey that correspond to the material used by the Royal Air Force and may have come from the pocket of a tunic. A single button, the snout from an oxygen mask was found, each being recorded in the inventory of personal effects. There were no remains of human bodies found.

Unquote:

Quote:

Conclusions on the actions of the
S.H.A.A. and
the Museum of Aeronautics of Fleville

The first analysis of the investigation by the S.H.A.A. the Museum of Aeronautics and field researchers is deemed to be accurate and is re-enforced by the on the spot investigations. The certainty of the near vertical impact of the plane is agreed. Mon.Jean-Pierre

LEGENDRE confirms the fact that the motors were totally disintegrated but were however "in-line", each having their respective site. The report also indicates that the nose of the plane relative to the position of the four engines was manifest by a hole caused by the fuselage and in which clearly, someone had efectively thrown the debris. Oddly, the residents did not recover the two parachutes, or the brass button belonging to the clothing of a tunic. At the same time the aluminium was considered as a valuable nonferrous metal. Two heavy steel plates that were jettisoned in the hole were also recovered.

The absence of human remains is inexplicable, especially in view of the depth of the investigation conducted. It is understandable that the engine components were found at the depth they were because of their heavy mass. It is hardly possible however, for human remains to penetrate as deep. The use of a powerful metal detector on the sight where the excavations were being conducted revealed high volumes of metal that were believed to be from the plane, it was agreed by Mon. Moreau and Mon. Lignier that there was indisputable proof of the presence of an aircraft, and that all resources should be used to identify the plane and its crew, and that they should make use of the publicity and any other devices, to help researchers to determine these objectives.

Unquote.

Conclusions.

The remainder of the Dossier is made up from various newspaper reports, general information and much photographic material, all designed to produce a comprehensive record of the events

leading up to the identity of our aircraft. The translations I have included are relevant because they deal with the method and more importantly the people who carried out the investigations that led to the correct identification of both our aircraft and crew. They also give a more detailed description of the dedicated work carried out, to both recover the debris of our aircraft and to identify our crew with the speed and manner that they did. These people deserve the highest praise imaginable for their efforts on our behalf

It has been stated that some three tons of debris was recovered from the site and of this three tons the heaviest mass was made up from the four disintegrated Merlin engines. The tare weight of a Lancaster is given as 16.665 tons. That leaves some 13.665 tons unaccounted for.

Mon. Jean-Pierre LEGENDRE stated that he believes that scrap merchants would have recovered most of the metal from the fuselage and wings. He also states that from the evidence uncovered at the crash site) it was certain that the aircraft nose-dived into the ground. This was clearly manifest by the position of the engines on recovery. Each having its own site in line with each other, with the larger diameter hole formed by the fuselage situated in line at the centre of the four engines. In that central hole created by the nose of the aircraft, they discovered those two essential items of debris that enabled the researchers to positively identify the aircraft. The actual location of these items on the aircraft would be about amidships along the fuselage or near to the exit door on the starboard side. Their final location was either nothing short of miraculous or, they were deliberately deposited there for some reason. I choose to believe the

scrap merchants deliberately put them there for one of two possible reasons. Firstly, they may have wished to ensure that at some future date, that if the remains were to be discovered, then this would help with the identification (as indeed it did) secondly, they were put there to conceal any chance of identity by officials or police should they be caught in possession of the scrap metal. In either case it was most fortuitous for both the investigation team and for we the survivors of Lancaster Bomber RA502.

Two parachutes were discovered and these too were found in that central hole. One of these parachutes still had the snaphooks attached and that would certainly have indicated that the wearer of that parachute, (who could have been either Andy or Norman) would have died with the aircraft. The other parachute however could just as easily have been, and in all probability was, the spare parachute that is normally stored behind the pilot's seat. This parachute would not have snaphooks attached as would have been the case had it been attached to the wearers harness. It is therefore, arguable that there should have been three parachutes and not two. Where did that third parachute end up? Is it not possible that the scrap merchants having missed the other two, took this third parachute for the then valuable silk it was manufactured from?

Six of the eight Browning machine-guns were recovered along with some live ammunition still contained in the part remains of the cartridge belts. I would guess the two guns from the front turret could be buried deeper than was investigated and consequently these could still be lying there, or possibly, they could have been so distorted that they were unrecognisable among so much other twisted metallic material.

The two heavy steel plates were obviously the armoured protection behind the pilots seat. These would almost certainly be in that area of the nose section and it is equally certain also that these could conceivably resist the impact forces with much greater effect than the majority of the other components.

Jean-Pierre LEGENDRE told me that when he first came across the nitrogen bottles, they were caked with earth and clay and not clearly recognisable, consequently; he treated these with some considerable suspicion just in case they happened to be bombs. I mention this only to outline the danger that may be encountered when dealing with excavations of this kind. It is quite conceivable that from the size and shape of these bottles that they could just as easily be mistaken for small bombs.

Why were there no human remains discovered at the crash site? Is it not possible that these same scrap merchants mentioned by Jean-Pierre discovered certain remains of these two airmen and buried them elsewhere? If one should consider the impact forces developed on such a large aircraft. when crashing to earth from some sixteen thousand feet, in a near vertical dive it is not unreasonable to assume that the human body would suffer none the less disintegration than the aircraft itself. Any person trapped in such a vehicle under those circumstances. would in all probability be totally disintegrated along with the vehicle and consequently, there would be parts of human remains spread over the whole area of the crash site. If this is to be considered a possible scenario, is it just possible that these human remains were gathered up and buried just to conceal the fact that they were there at all? Finally, quite possibly, this could just as much have been an act of

reverence by those people who could appreciate the value of last rites for another human being.

With regard to the bodies of our two lost comrades, the fact that several fragments of cloth similar to the cloth used for the manufacture of our uniforms, a brass button, together with and even more significant, the first aid kit that is normally kept in the front pocket of the trouser leg pocket was also found. This would suggest to me that the wearer of that article of clothing died with the aircraft and his body disintegrated as with the aircraft itself. This it seems could provide a plausible answer for one of our crew, but still does not provide an answer to the last resting place of the other whoever he may be.

John-Paul Basset appeared to be confused about the actual location of the mid-air collision. This can easily be answered by the fact that he mistakenly assumed the collision took place over the target area at Ludwigshafen. This of course is quite wrong, because in fact the collision took place quite near to Fléville where the crash remains were found.

During our first visit to Fleville in October 1998, I met an elderly French lady who told me a story of the night of the 1st February 1945. She told me that she had heard this almighty crash very near to the farmhouse where she lived, but was not sure exactly what it was. I asked her if she had ventured outside to discover what the cause of the disturbance was? She replied, "*No no, I was much too frightened to do so*". She went on to relate how her father during the next day found an airman's flying boot with the remains of the foot still inside the boot. She told me that her father had buried both the boot and the remains, under what she described as an English tree that grew quite near to the

village cemetery. I have no doubt that this story was indeed genuine and I hope to be able to go back one day just to find and see this old English tree where quite possibly, a part of either Andy or Norman now lay.

The identification of our aircraft was indeed a formidable task carried out with great skill, enthusiasm, and diligence. All the people involved were each in their own particular field very widely conversant and experienced in this activity. Both Patrick Baumann and John-Paul Basset are very experienced and knowledgeable young men. It can be seen that their conscientious and diligent work involved with the identification of both the aircraft and crew was successfully accomplished in a manner that clearly indicated their ability to do so.

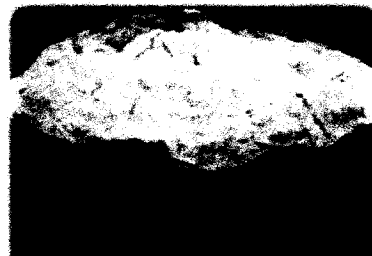
Jean-Pierre Legendre however, is the consummate professional archaeologist with vast experience in field archaeology. I had the very real pleasure in proof-reading certain inclusions of a personal nature contained in his paper about the discovery of our aircraft. The paper was presented at the 1999 Conference of European Archaeologists at Bournemouth University.

These three gentlemen I believe were the principal driving force involved with the task of identification. Jean-Pierre provided the physical evidence and both Patrick and John-Paul interpreted the finds for what they were worth. I must qualify this statement, as I do not want in any way whatsoever to detract from the efforts of all those other workers whose contributions were so important to the final successful conclusion. I should also like to congratulate Georges-Didier Rohrbacher of the S.H.A.A. on his very professional correlation of all the events

and reports on the incident. Georges-Didier was indeed a most generous and kindly correspondent who kept me informed with e-mails of the day-to-day progress being made in the development of the project.

The following photographic illustrations clearly indicate the level of devastation caused by the crash. One can only guess the astronomical forces required to reduce this aircraft to the total destruction it underwent. When one sees the evidence were such a robust component as a Merlin engine is reduced to relatively small-distorted bits and pieces, it requires very little imagination to appreciate the colossal impact forces involved and to understand why there were no human remains to be found.

The following are some photographs of the debris to show the degree of damage caused by the crash:



The two parachutes found at the site of the crash

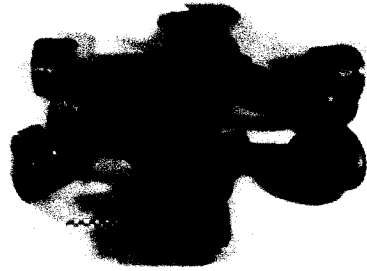
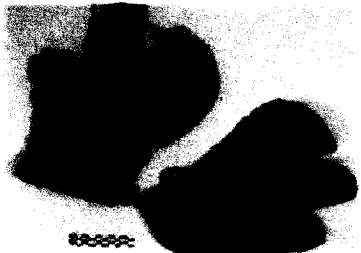


Above: Shows the snap hooks normally fixed to the wearers harness.

Below: Front undercarriage wheel.

The picture below shows the first aid kit that is normally kept in the front trouser leg pocket.

The electically heated gloves normally worn by air-gunners.

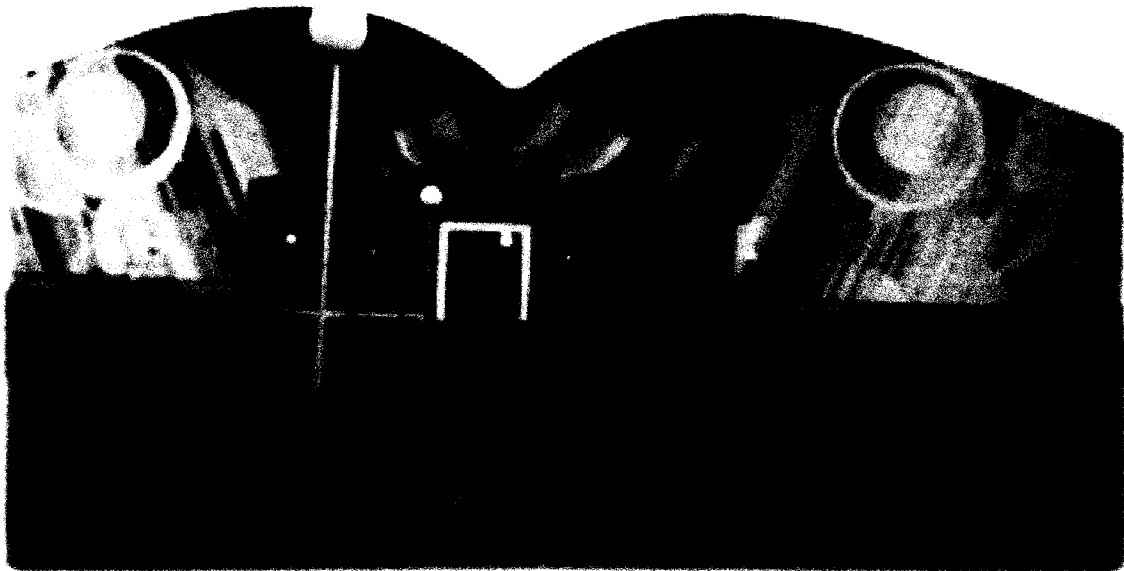


Six Pistons and Connecting Rods on half a crankshaft where there should have been 12 Pistons and con-rods.

Underneath: is a Cylinder Head.

Nytrogen Bottles. underneath a recovered Browning Machine-gun





.The Aeronautical Museum at Nancy.



Technician at the
Museum of Nancy.
Working on the
preparation of
Artifacts for
Exhibition.

Chapter 12.

The Pilgrimage.

The pilgrimage to Fleville-devant-Nancy was one of the most poignant journeys of my life. The journey was in reality a return to the past of some 53 years previous in order to commemorate the lives of two young men. These two young men who for a short time had been, not just two members of our crew, but part of a very close knit family of seven. Andy James just 19 years of age and Norman Tinsely also about the same age did not live to see their 21st year. We knew them for who they were at that time and as far as we were concerned they had no relevant past and indeed, a very unpredictable future, only the present mattered, that was the way of things at that time. I have often given this wartime philosophy some considerable thought. It appeared to me that this was the way most of us reacted to the possibility of being here today and quite possibly gone tomorrow. There seemed no point in delving into the past lives of one's crew members because one never knew if there was going to be a future of any certainty. Therefore, we asked very few questions about ones past and proceeded with our lot as though we had known each other for a whole lifetime. If I was asked what I knew of Andy and Norman, I would have to say with all honesty, very little, and yet there has not been a day since when I have not at some point in time given them some thought.

We, that is, Bill, Eddie, Allan and myself had just got together after nearly fifty years Then out of the blue came this telephone call from Jack Harris. He told me of the discovery of RA502. Z.Zebra

and suggested I should get in touch with Patrick Baumann who was then trying to gather information on the incident that occurred on the night of the 1st-2nd February 1945. It seemed fated that we the surviving members of the crew should each be in touch with other when the discovery was made. Almost as if this was what fate had intended. For me the discovery was as traumatic an event as almost any in my life because it triggered off so many memories of those war years and the time we spent together on the Squadron. I could so plainly see these two guys as if it were only yesterday. There was Norman either whistling, singing or just humming Beautiful Dreamer and then there was Andy complaining about that horrible noise he was making. I could also picture the seriously minded Aubrey Lohrey looking on with his quietly tolerant smile that reminded me of one of my old schoolmasters, as if to say now now boys behave yourselves. I could still recall the incident of the collision and the dreadful news that both Andy and Norman were missing believed killed. I distinctly remember it took such a long time before I came to terms with the fact that they were not coming back. That they were indeed dead and no longer with us. Although it was several months before I was convinced that both Andy and Norman had been killed. In all probability they had for reasons we shall never know for sure, failed to bale out. It is more than just conceivable that they may have delayed their departure too long and if this were the case, the aircraft may have already gone into a steep dive that would have made exit totally impossible.

One of the more frustrating situations I found myself in, was not knowing exactly where Andy and Norman may have come down to earth and together with the fact that their final resting place was to remain unknown. This often left me with a feeling of immense sorrow and was I suppose, a reason I failed to become involved with any of our Squadron reunions or the Caterpillar Club, nor did I commit myself to any act of getting in touch with my surviving comrades. However, in 1993, Alan Jarnell got in touch with Bill, Eddie and myself and as a direct result of his intervention we all met up once again at the 1995 Caterpillar Club reunion in Blackpool. We have continued to remain in touch ever since.

The news of the discovery of Z.Zebra had truly taken me by surprise. With so many thoughts and questions passing through my mind. Would they uncover the remains of both Andy and Norman? And if so what would they do about it? What else would they find? Then I heard of the intention of the French authorities in Fleville, to erect a memorial to Andy and Norman and also to a third airman who had been killed in the other aircraft involved in the incident. The truth of that matter was that I did not know until then that another airman had been killed.

A provisional date for the ceremony was fixed for June 1998. However, due to the current World Cup Soccer Tournament, and the likelihood of traffic congestion and other restriction on available amenities, this date was later postponed to October 24th 1998. There were however, some minor hitches to the proposed travel arrangements.

Squadron Leader Martin Parker who happened to be Bill Anderson's son-in-law approached the RAF in the first instance, but sadly, any favourable response to his application just this did not materialise. It

seems that the present day RAF are not at all interested in those fellow airmen who gave their lives during that second world war.

Then the British Legion volunteered to take on the task of providing travel arrangements and a guide. They planned to provide us all with a Coach and Guide. They also suggested that we that is Allan Eddie Bill and myself the principal guests should travel free of any charge. But they too withdrew their offer a matter of eight days before the departure date, because, they said, a small group of some 13 pilgrims was insufficient numbers to cover the costs involved. I must admit that I was fast becoming completely disillusioned and fed up with the whole system who appeared to suggest that unless there was something in it for themselves, then they just didn't want to know.

My immediate response to this setback was to set in motion plans for making our own way to France. I had already telephoned Bill, Eddie and Allan to this effect and it was then that Eddie told me of his wife's illness and how he doubted he would be able to leave his wife Vivian at that time.

Prior to all this a Ms Linda Moore of "Results" a Public Relations Company of Gretton in Northhant's had contacted me about public interest and the possibility of National Press coverage of the event. I subsequently contacted Linda and told her about the situation as it stood at that time. Her reply to this was emphatic! she told me not to worry, that she would get us there even if she had to drive the bus herself. Fortunately she didn't have drive the bus herself. But she did manage to provided all necessary transport and convenience to get us all to Fleville at a very reasonable cost. (Considerably less than the price originally quoted by BL). The transport

comprised a 54 seater Luxury Coach with all the comfort of a 1st Class Pullman Railway Coach. Ken, our driver was without doubt one of the best drivers I have ever encountered, both in driving skills and in humor.

By arrangement we all met up with each other on the eve of our departure at the British Legion Club in London. After a pleasant evening together during which we discussed all the information and events that had taken place during the period leading up to our meeting, we spent the night in hotel accommodation provided by the British Legion.

Our journey to France began at six o'clock in the morning on the 23 Oct 1998. The party of thirteen included Allan on his own, Bill and his wife Molly, Martin Parker (Sqd/Ld RAF. Bills son in-law) and his wife. Peter Oliver who also was another of Bills sons-law and his wife Teressa, Gladys Gowans (Andy's sister) with husband Jack. Finally there was Amy and myself and the two BBC representatives comprising Cameraman and Reporter Emma Jones. Sadly, because Eddie's wife Vivian being terminally ill with cancer, Eddie did not attend.

The first stage of our journey took us to the cross channel ferry at Dover where our departure was at first under some doubt because of the high almost gale force winds. Nevertheless, we still sailed on time and after a not so smooth ferry crossing during which the face of my wife Amy turned a very unhealthy shade of green although thankfully, she was not physically sea sick, we arrived safely on French soil at last.

Ken supervised our re-boarding on the coach and we set off on our long and tedious bus journey to Fleville. I noticed Ken was very conscious of the speeding regulations in France and even though we traveled all the way via main motorway toll roads, he diligently adhered to the

obligatory 90 kph for the whole journey to Fleville. He later told me the speeding fines were quite severe in France.

After only one minor navigational hitch we arrived at our Fleville Hotel. "*Novotel Quest*". in the early part of the evening.

The Hotel management had generously set aside 10 rooms for the party that were totally free of any charge. In each of the principle guests rooms i.e. myself, Bill and Allan, there was a gift wrapped box containing a magnificent 1st Edition Model of a Mk.1. Lancaster, that had been presented by the members of Rotary International of Nancy Stanislas. A note attached contained the words "***Tous Les Membres Du Rotary Stanislas Vous Souhaitent Un Ageeable Sejour En Lorraine***" this translates, ***All members of the Rotary Stanislas wish you an agreeable stay in Lorraine!*** This was to be just a prelude leading to so many more acts of overwhelming generosity and goodwill to be demonstrated by all those wonderful French people that we were privileged to meet.

That evening after dinner we were each asked to attend a personal interview by BBC reporter Emma Jones and her cameraman. This interview took place in a private room where each of us was individually and discretely questioned about the incident of the night of 1st-2nd February 1945. During this interview we were taken back in time to the night of the incident and the events that took place. The interview was of a very personal nature during which we talked about our inner thoughts and private recollections of the incident. The method Emma adopted was simply to use an occasional prompt then wait for what was really a moment to express ones very personal feelings and thoughts of what we each felt about the incident. I have always harbored that feeling of guilt that just

maybe, if I had had the chance and the time, that maybe I could have done more to keep our aircraft in the air. Even now and even in spite of the fact that I don't know what more I could have done. That thought and feeling has remained with me ever since. After all, I was the Flight Engineer; it was my job to do something more than to just feather two engines. That interview however, did much to rationalise the deep feelings of my own inadequacy. It made me face the fact that, in spite of what ones personal feelings are, that at that time, there is only one man in charge of any given situation. He makes the decision and one never argues. In retrospect I know it was the right decision. The proof of this is clear; Aubrey and four members of his crew have survived to testify to the fact..

The following morning Martin introduced us to Wing Commander Gunner, British Air Attaché based in Paris. Wing Commander Gunner apart from officially representing the RAF acted as coordinator and language translator for the whole ceremony and all the accompanying formal addresses. He began by introducing us one by one to Monsieur Jean-Marie Girard, the Mayor of Fleville and translated my remarks about the unfortunate absence of Eddie Westhorpe our Navigator due to the terminal illness of his wife Vivian. The Mayor then asked me to pass on his condolences and his desire for her speedy recovery. Tragically, Eddies wife Vivian died soon after our return to the UK.

Immediately following this formal introduction we all set off to visit the site of the Monument. The monument was set just off the roadside under which the crash remains where uncovered. When we arrived there we were truly amazed at the number of people who had gathered there for the ceremony. The organisation for the event was perfect in every detail.

On arrival, we were ushered into a specially erected tent where we were served coffee and formally introduced to the many dignitaries of the Council of Fleville and the local MP for Fleville. There was the Commanding Officer of the nearby Air Force Base, Commandant Henry Jeandet, Squadron Commandant Colonel Rouquefueil and other notable archaeologists and researchers who had been involved with the identification of both the aircraft and our crew. I suppose that without the knowledge and tenacity of these dedicated people, the truth of what happened to this aircraft and its crew may well have never come to light. Furthermore, the fate of our comrades would still have remained just another entry in some obscure Government record. Killed in action, grave unknown.

The Monument itself was covered in a white shroud and I, like my comrades could only guess at what the unveiling would reveal. We all assembled facing the shrouded Monument standing on the verge beside the road. This was overlooked by three flagpoles. The flags representing the three Nations or England, Canada and France, each flag being attended by schoolboys in readiness for raising.

The assembly was flanked on one side by a French Army Air Force Guard of Honour and on the opposite flank stood twelve proud veteran French Standard Bearers. There was a small military band present and a PA system supported the formal addresses.

We along with the many attending dignitaries stood within the bounds of small circles that had been painted on the road surface, each of us being allotted a particular station. The ceremony began with various speeches from the Mayor, the local MP. Wing Commander Gunner expertly translated each of these speeches to English for our benefit. The

general drift of all these speeches was that of deep gratitude to the allied liberation forces and in particular to honour Andy and Norman together with Virgil Linguist who also died as a direct result of the same incident. That they should not be forgotten a second time.

Sq./Ld Martin Parker related the events that took place during the incident and paid tribute to Bill Anderson for his unselfish act of bravery on releasing Allan Jarnell from his jammed rear turret. He also praised Aubrey Lowrey for his skill and dedication in holding the stricken aircraft in straight and level flight long enough to allow his crew to abandon the aircraft. I was mentioned in overcoming the difficulties in freeing the forward escape hatch to enable those of us to escape by that route.

A local priest performed a short service of dedication to the three airmen who had given their lives so that others may live in freedom of fear of occupation and tyranny. The raising of the flags accompanied by a taped recording of the three National Anthems, Canadian, English and French followed the dedication service.

The dedication ceremony was in itself one of the most moving and emotional experiences of my life and never for a moment could I have envisaged anything to surpass the occasion; That is until we were invited to unveil the monument itself. As I assisted with the unveiling and could see just what was under the shroud, I was completely overtaken by the emotion that overflowed from within me. The magnificence of the monument that stood there before my eyes was stunning in every sense of the word. The monument was composed of highly polished red granite that stood some five feet tall and approximately six inches thick. The fascia that had been sculptured with a single blade off one of the rescued propellers stood on a red granite plinth

and to the left of this fascia stood another small fascia with the inscription.

La mémoire des sergents

Norman TINSLEY

Andrew JAMES

Virgil FERNQUIST

LANCASTER

RA502 550Sq

NG202 170 Sq

Entres en collision

dans la nuit du

1st Fevrier 1945

Each of these fascias was mounted side by side and in line on a single polished red granite plinth. The sight of this truly magnificent monument took every ounce of my self-control to hold back the tears of emotion I felt at that moment. The satisfaction and joy that at last these wonderful patriotic French people of Fléville-devant-Nancy had honoured our two lost comrades and a third comrade of Lancaster NG 202 in such a generous manner. Truly, they had provided a final focal point of remembrance for everybody, but for me personally, it was somewhere tangible, a place where one could visit whenever one felt the need to remember and talk. I really did feel that at last; after some fifty-three years later; Norman and Andy had finally been properly laid to rest. I cannot express the feelings of joy, pride and satisfactions that at last it had happened.

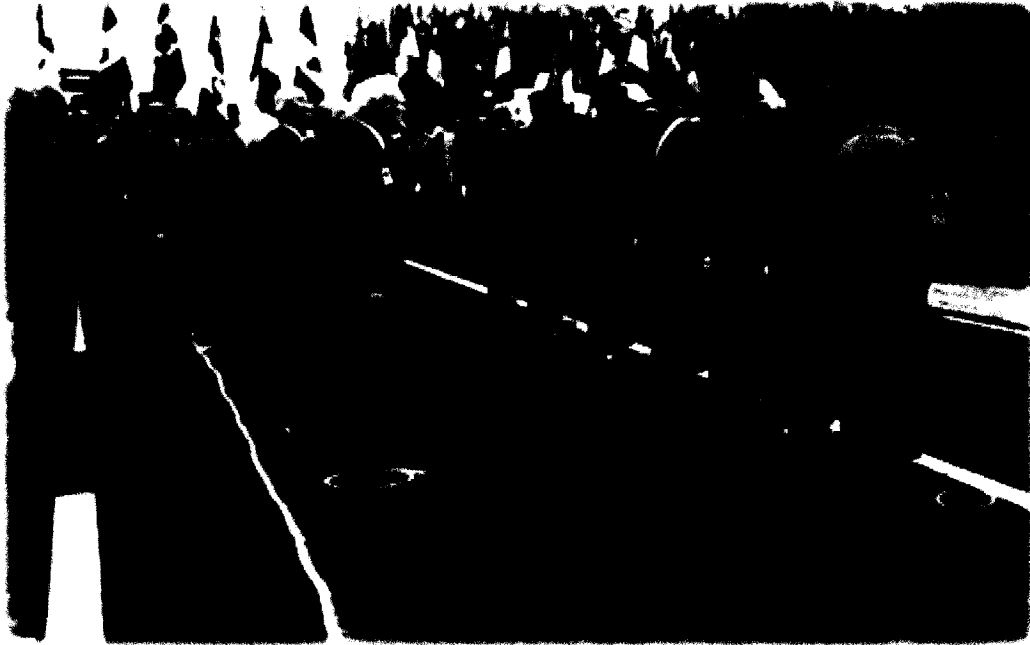
After the unveiling of the monument the ritual of laying the many wreathes was carried out, the same young schoolboys who had earlier stood by the flagpoles attended this ritual. Evidence of the efficiency and preciseness of the organisation for the ceremony was clearly apparent, where even these young school children had obviously been so well rehearsed in everything they did

The dedication ceremony over, we were informed by Wing Commander Gunner that it was traditional to shake hands with the Standard Bearers. All of these Standard Bearers were of a mature age and obviously, very proud veterans of world war two. I admit, as did my companions, we cannot say how pleased we were when given the opportunity to shake hands and thank them for being in attendance I thought this was a really splendid gesture and enjoyed the tradition very much indeed. The four of us Bill, Alan and myself accompanied by Gladys Gowans, "Andy's sister"

then made ourselves available for the press photographers and reporters. It must be said that throughout the day this was not in anyway excessively obtrusive and one felt that any time spent answering questions was of small account in view of the time, expense and effort made by so many others. Others who had willingly gave of their time and effort without thought of reward or recompense. We eventually left the site of the Monument for a reception and lunch at a newly built Gymnasium on the outskirts of Nancy where we were to meet many more wonderful people with so many memories they wanted to share with us.

I took part in assisting the
Mayor of Fléville with the
unveiling of the
Monument.





The general assembly at the commencement of the Dedication Ceremony



The French Air Army Force Guard of Honour

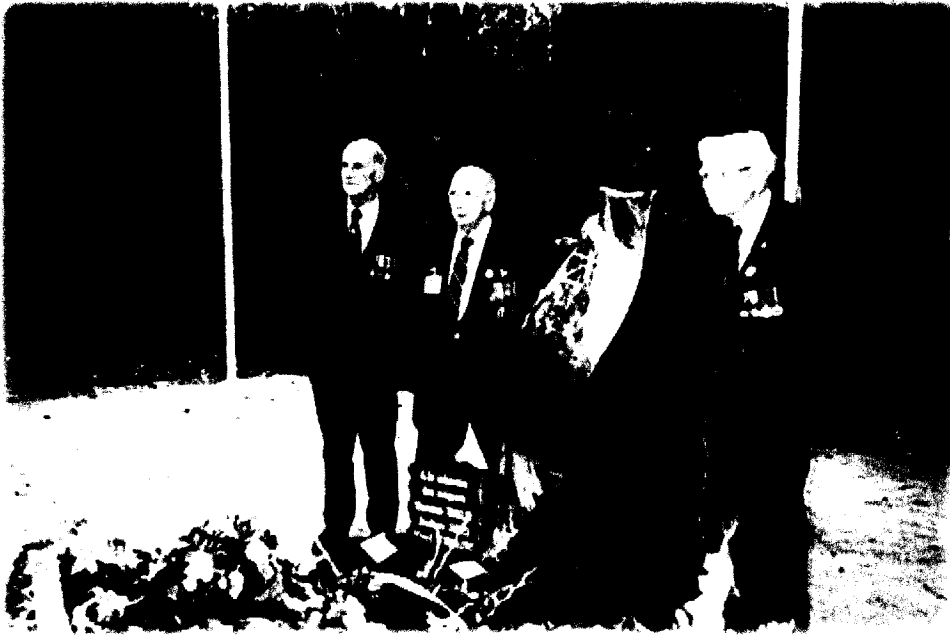




The Standard Bearers

Gladis Vic Bill Patrick Alan Colonel
Baumann Rouquefueil





Bill. Myself. And Alan

After the Dedication Ceremony



Mainly memories of the occupation itself and their recollections of that particular time in history when they were overwhelmed by the German armed forces.

One old lady in particular recounted her experience of the night of the 1st February 1945 when she heard the screaming noise of a plane in distress and as it hit the ground she felt the house shake as it did so, I asked her if she went outside to see what it was or how near it was. No, No she replied, I was much too frightened to do so, so I stayed inside until the following morning.

Another lady told of the story related to her by her grandfather of finding human bones and burying these under what she described as a English tree near the cemetery. He did not report this to the authorities, because he was not sure that they would leave them undisturbed.

After the war another Frenchman had reported seeing a plane come down near Fleville on the night of the 1st February 1945 but could not positively identify the exact location, consequently, the police did not take action then because the area described was too large for excavational investigation.

Another man told of finding an American airman's flying boot. I was most interested in this because I lost both of my flying boots when I baled out. I have often wondered since if this was one of my own flying boots.

Quite a lot of our time was spent signing copies of an artist's impression of the collision. There were some that had been prepared in the form of tablemats, but others without the plastic covering bearing our name and designation at the bottom of the page. It was on this type

we were asked by the recipients to sign our names adjacent to our printed name. I believe we must have signed well in excess of a hundred of these before sitting down to lunch. Again it must be said that this was a task we all undertook with much pleasure and pride. After all, it is not often in ones lifetime does one get asked by so many people for ones autograph. It really did make you feel very special indeed.

The lunch as expected was a delicious sample of French cuisine and wine followed by the usual coffee and mints. Colonel Willier gave a talk on the history of Bomber Command during the Second World War. This Colonel was a world war two Halifax Bomber pilot.

I was able to follow this narration with the exclusive help of one of the young lady hostesses whom I was fortunate to be seated next to. She expertly and simultaneously translated word for word his talk on the subject, which he obviously knew very well. After his talk on Bomber Command we were asked to say a few words in response to the mornings dedication ceremony, Allan and Bill began and I followed on last. We all thanked our hosts from the bottom of our hearts for all they had done in honour and in memory of our lost comrades. We praised their contributions and their hospitality. I was particular to point out certain individuals who were responsible for the research and the identification of the plane and its occupants. After I had finished my short address I was truly amazed when we all received a standing ovation from the whole gathering. It certainly expressed to me that theirs was a spontaneous feeling so genuine and so honest that will always stay with me for the remainder of my life. This was brought home to me when at the reception before lunch, we found ourselves being constantly referred to as liberators, a term that was commonly used throughout the whole

day. After more than a half a century, here are people constantly reminding their children of the debt they owe to their elders. A philosophy I find difficult to come to terms with after nearly fifty-four years since World War II had come to an end. After lunch we continued with meeting the various people present and once more resumed our signing of autographs on the memorabilia as presented to us. We were still signing when Wing Commander Gunner called a halt to the proceedings so that we could continue on to the scheduled visit to the Aeronautical Museum of Nancy.

The Aeronautical Museum of Nancy was a very impressive specially built hanger type building. The frontage was adorned with a huge winged shaped mural. Inside the building were numerous vintage aeroplanes and other wartime transport equipment. The display of the debris from our Lancaster was confined to a special section of the Museum with some pieces housed in a display cabinet. Also, there was one of the parachutes unfolded and draped from the ceiling. This appeared to be in excellent condition considering it had been buried for over a half a century. There were the remains of one side of the main undercarriage struts and a front wheel axle. From the position of the lugs on the legs, I believe it was the starboard side undercarriage leg. A number of engine parts were on view e.g. cylinder heads and crankshafts that had been distorted and broken in half. These still held the twisted and bent connecting rods to which the pistons were still attached. There were parts of the cylinders containing the liners, there were carburetor parts including a distorted super-charger. Some nitrogen and oxygen bottles and other bits and

pieces. A three bladed propeller and hub assembly had been fixed together by means of various screws, nuts and bolts and if one ignored the cosmetics it could be regarded as fair example of what the original looked like

Seeing these crumbled remains of what was once our Lancaster had a very sobering effect on me. One could only imagine the astronomical forces involved to reduce this aircraft to its present state. A state were a solid mass such as robust piece of machinery such as the Rolls Royce Merlin Engine could be reduced to relatively minute proportions of twisted and distorted fragments. If one can imagine what would happen to anyone going down with this aircraft, it is of little wonder that no trace of human remains were found during the excavations.

The highlight of this visit however, was the presentation of one of pistons that had been recovered. These were beautifully prepared and mounted on a wood plinth with a brass plaque inscribed with the name and rank of each recipient. In addition to the Pistons we were each presented with a Bronze Medallion and photo album containing photographs illustrating the various items of debris that were exhibited in the Museum. After the presentation there followed an address by the Curator of the Museum, who went to great lengths to describe the heroism and debt of gratitude owed by the French people of Nancy to all those airmen who gave their lives so that others might live in freedom of occupation by foreign aggressors. During our visit to the Museum we were once again asked to give a video press interview. The interview was mainly to gather our feelings and reactions to the dedication ceremony and our visit to the

museum. Emma Jones the young BBC reporter who with her cameraman had traveled with us from the start at the British Legion Headquarters in London. By then both she and her cameraman had been accepted as part of the group and consequently, we were already close friends. She had told us that this was her first major assignment and while she would be trying hard to make a success of the event, she did not wish to make herself objectionable in any way.

She particularly sort our reaction to the ceremony which was for me, a very emotional experience. We also talked about our feelings and reactions to seeing the recovered parts of our old Lancaster. Finally we discussed the reception we received from the local people of Fléville-devant-Nancy. Before leaving the Museum we were called upon to sign many more of the illustrations that had found their way from the Gymnasium to the Museum, and once again this pleasurable interval was terminated by W/Co. Gunner who in his usual efficient manner had, as requested, arranged a final visit to the site of the Monument before returning to our Hotel. On our return to the Monument, we were truly amazed at the number of people who were still gathered at site. They all appeared to be genuinely interested in the Monument and upon seeing our arrival they all respectfully stood to one side while we paid our last respects. Emma had asked us if she could video this private visit with a promise that she would not interfere in any way. We agreed she could. A short time later we were on our way back to our Hotel whereupon W/Co. Gunner informed us that we had approximately 40 minutes to wash and change before setting off to Nancy for a Civic reception.

The Town Hall in Nancy could quite easily and justifiably be described as a palace. The building of huge stately

architectural proportions stood opposite the entrance gate of Stanislas Square with a statue of Stanislas himself looking on from the centre of the courtyard. For me, it was a great shame our view was blighted by the lack of available daylight to take in all the splendour of this magnificent building. As one walked through the main entrance and into the building itself the magnificence of the architecture was just as impressive. We were ushered into relatively small anti room, even so this room was big enough to house well in excess of the hundred or so guests who were present at our champagne reception. The Deputy Lord Mayor of Nancy welcomed us and spoke at length about world war two and the role played by both the French and the Allied Forces. He made particular reference to our lost comrades and was proud that they had been honoured in the way they had been and well deserved. He remarked how the younger generation of France should never be allowed to forget the debt owed to their elders. After the speech's were done we generally mixed with our hosts and guests and talked to each other mainly through the few bilingual people present. It really was a most pleasant and relaxing time to be able to mix and hold conversation with so many nice people. The light buffet and champagne gave us all a chance to relax and wind down after what was a very traumatic and emotional day.

Two hours later we left Stanislas Town Hall with so many overwhelming feelings of the days events. Nothing that could possibly happen afterwards could surpass what had already occurred that day. For us, the day was complete, we had said our farewells to the many new and dear friends we had made during the day with solemn promises to return once again in the coming new year. As we had all sat down in the coach for our return

journey to our hotel, firstly Patrick Baumann came onto the bus and thanked us all for coming to France on this auspicious occasion, he then wished us all farewell and a safe journey home. Following this, Wing Commander Gunner also came aboard to thank us and he bid us a fond farewell also. It was then off to our Hotel in Fleville.

Before dinner that evening I enjoyed a relaxing ice-cold bottle of lager at the hotel bar and then retired to the dining room for a late dinner with the rest of our party.

There must have been a great many talking points during that dinner, but for one reason or another we seemed to avoid the subject uppermost in the minds of us all. I do believe that like me, the magnificence of all that had taken place, The very singular experience of seeing the Monument and all that it meant, left us all not quite ready for conversation on the subject that had left so emotionally bound up.

The following morning we had breakfast and prepared to take our leave. As we assembled in the foyer with our cases all packed and ready, we were greeted by Sergeant Georges-Diddier Rohrbacher standing there clutching an armful of the local newspaper *L'est Republicain* with virtually a full page spread on the previous days events. This gesture merely emphasises the generosity and thoughtfulness of the French people generally.

In conclusion, our pilgrimage to France was a journey that will live in my memory for the rest of my life. The people of Fleville-devant-Nancy are indeed the most generous and loyal

people I have ever met. The erection of the monument in honour of our comrades was truly of magnificent proportions and reflects the genuine feelings of all the people concerned. Everyone I spoke to evoked a keen sensitivity of the occasion that was unmistakably honest and sincere. I cannot foresee how I can ever thank them for all they have done for Andy and Norman, and Virgil too, or for the wonderful hospitality they had showered on us during our short time there.

Merci beaucoup mes ames Francais.