



Flying Officer J J Logan DFC

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550 Squadron **Lancaster LL836**

Born 15/5/17 in Penicuik, Scotland

Pre War was Grocery Salesman with Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society

RAF service commenced as Leading Aircraftsman at RAF Cardington 18/1/40

No.1 School of Air Navigation, Canada 12/10/40

Recommended for pilot training 26/2/42

Qualified as Air Navigator 31/7/42

Commissioned as Officer 3/12/42

Began pilot training 1/8/43

Posted to 550Sqn (as Navigator) 25/11/43

Shot down and killed in LL836 at Achiet le Petit 11/4/44

Lancaster LL836

Serial range LL617 – LM296 This aircraft was one of 450 Lancasters ordered from Armstrong Whitworth Aircraft Apr42 and built as 100 Mk.11s with Hercules XV1 engines delivered from Oct43 to Mar44 and 350 Mk.1s with Merlin 24 engines initially installed and delivered from Nov43 to Aug44.

LL836 wa a Mk.1 and was delivered to 550 Sqdn Feb44 Also took part in the Key Operation against Stuttgart 15/16Mar44.

When lost this aircraft had a total of 44 hours.

Airborne 2325 10Apr44 from North Killingholme tasked to bomb the railway yards at Aulnoye. Shot down by a night-fighter and crashed less than a kilometre NNW of Achiet-le-Petit in the Pas-de-Calais, 7 km NW of Bapaume. All are buried in Achiet-le-Petit Communal Cemetery. Sgt Williams had won an immediate DFM, Gazetted 2May44, for showing selfless disregard for his own safety while aiding an injured comrade while on recent operations over Berlin. F/I Waycott had previously served with 101 Sqdn and details of his award were Gazetted 13Jul43. F/L R.W.Picton DFC KIA Sgt T.H.Guest KIA F/O J.J.Logan DFC KIA F/O J.F.Potter KIA Sgt K.P.C.Williams DFM KIA F/L W.H.Waycott DFM KIA Sgt W.Essar RCAF KIA ”

Extract from 550 Squadron Log

Operation/Target: Aulnoye (10 Apr 1944 - 11 Apr 1944)

Operation Summary

Target	Out	Back	Aborted (Y / N)	Comments
Aulnoye	10 Apr 1944	11 Apr 1944	N	Fifteen aircraft and crew were offered for operations and were briefed to attack the marshalling yards at AULNOYE. The weather was clear over the channel and France, and at the target some thin cloud or ground haze did not prevent the PFF markers being clearly seen. The attack was well concentrated and many HE explosions were seen. Returning to the French coast active searchlights and flak were encountered, while night fighters were also active in the area. LL747 "P" (Captain F/O J.O. Richard) had an inconclusive combat with an ME109, and strikes were seen, although no claim was made. No damage ot casualties were recevied by aircraft "P". All our aircraft returned safely to Base, except LL836 "E" (Captain F/Lt R.W. Picton) about which no news has been received since take off.

1940-1944



André COILLIOT

TOME II

Sept. 1943 - Mai 1944

4 LONGUES ANNÉES d'OCCUPATION

LE RECIT DES EVENEMENTS VECUS DANS LA REGION d'ARRAS

Translation from French of an extract from M Coilliot's book

The night of the 11th-12th April 1944

Achiet-le-Petit

The loss of an English bomber

Returning from a raid on the rail yards at Aulnoye, the Lancaster heavy bomber BE-LL836 from 550 Squadron of the RAF, based at North Killingholme, passed at low altitude over the village of Achiet-le Petit, and exploded on hitting the ground near Logeast Wood (about 2.5 Kms from the village).

Several shattered fragments of the plane were strewn over the fields. Countless pieces of debris were scattered over an area of more than 200 m around the site. Found amongst them were the bodies of the 7 crew members. All were killed. 3 bodies seemed to be intact, 3 were reduced to ashes, the last was crushed in a field of lucerne, his body driven 30 cms into the ground. The debris was still burning when the villagers arrived. Some German soldiers prevented the curious from approaching. During this time, the mayor received a visit from some German officers, who ordered him to have a pit dug, to bury the 7 airmen as quickly as possible. M Valle, astonished by the haste the officers were demanding, refused to proceed on such terms: coffins were needed. After long drawn out discussions, the officers accepted his proposal and on their departure the mayor ordered the 7 coffins from the Military Burials Service in Arras. There was nothing left to do but await their delivery.

Shortly afterwards, the 7 bodies were taken back to the village and laid in the little community offices (known in the village as the Police Station or Fire Office). Volunteers laid them out on sacks and canvas on the ground. On the arrival of the very basic crates, the remains were placed in them. The door of the office was closed. They had to wait.

The following day, Wednesday 13th April, a farm trailer was taken to this makeshift mortuary, the coffins were loaded on to it and carried to the parish church for the funeral service, conducted by the priest of Bihucourt.

Set down in the choir, these airmen received the funeral they deserved. A considerable congregation took part, and even 3 German NCOs and soldiers were seen there. At the end of the ceremony, the coffins were reloaded on to the trailer and drawn away to the village cemetery by 2 horses.

No speeches, no outward show of excessive patriotism, were to be seen. It was simply a group of people gathered together to lay to rest 7 boys, full of life, who happened to die in this village.

Hauptmann Helmut Bergmann



Helmut Bergmann was born in 1920 in [Bochum](#). He joined the Luftwaffe in May 1940. After completing his pilot training in July 1941, he was assigned to the *Ergänzungsstaffel* (Training/Supplement Squadron) of [Nachtjagdgeschwader 1](#) (NJG 1—1st Night Fighter Wing).

He was then assigned to 8./[Nachtjagdgeschwader 4](#) (NJG 4—4th Night Fighter Wing) in early 1942.

Promoted Staffelkapitän of 7./NJG 4 in April 1944, Bergmann shot down 7 Lancasters in 46 minutes on the night of 10/11 April 1944, all from an RAF Bomber Command raid on the Aulnoye-Aymeries rail marshalling yard on the Franco-Belgian frontier. 38 Allied aircrew were killed. This was Bergmann's most successful sortie.

He was transferred to 6./NJG 4 in May.

On 9 June 1944 he received the [Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes](#) for achieving 30 victories.

The German Air-Ace that shot down 7 Lancaster bombers in 46 minutes

Extract from: Perilous Moon: Occupied France, 1944 – The End Game

The barely credible story of German air-ace Helmut Bergmann's murderous but triumphant 46 minutes of ice-cold attacking genius against a wave of RAF bombers two nights after Easter, 1944 sounds as though it should have been dismissed as the kind of fiction found in a schoolboy comic. But as the Paris-based documentary producer/cameraman Stuart Nimmo recounts in *Perilous Moon: Occupied France, 1944 – The End Game*, one of the seven Lancaster bombers from RAF Bomber Command that Bergmann's Messerschmitt shot down in that ruthless burst of destruction was being piloted by his Flight-Lieutenant father Neil — victim number six.

After shooting down a total of 16 enemy aircraft in 1942, Bergmann had had no further success for four months. He was hungry for a kill. But even he could have had no idea how his luck was about to change — with devastating results.

Bergmann's shooting spree, which killed 38 Lancaster crew members, started at 02:20 am, when "Bergmann struck with his twin nose cannon, raking the Lancaster from 100 metres away, and the first Lancaster of the night was destroyed." There were no survivors among the crew of seven. Then, writes Nimmo, Bergmann "got stuck in". Lancaster number two was lost, again with no survivors. A third bomber was soon destroyed too — this time with just one survivor. But no-one survived in Bergmann's fourth kill — at 02.43. He saw his fifth and sixth victims at the same time — just seven minutes later, and barely half an hour since his first strike. Having crippled the fifth (which later crashed, killing the pilot and two of the crew) Bergmann moved in on the next Lancaster — "a massive black silhouette against the clear night sky" — being piloted by Neil Nimmo.

"I saw the Lancaster..." the German would write the next morning. "The pilot was taking evasive action, weaving about, maybe avoiding searchlights. I started firing at 02.52 a.m. from about 100m below and into the fuselage and the right wing, which promptly caught fire. The burning Lancaster was trapped by the searchlights. At 02.54 I saw it burning on the ground."

Even now, it wasn't quite over. Low on fuel, Bergmann headed for home — but suddenly saw another Lancaster, this time flying alone. He and his crew couldn't resist one more burst of deadly canon fire. Once again, the pilot — and almost all the crew — perished. There was only one survivor. Bergmann's orgy of violence was finally over.

The detail in the book, including scores of photos and maps, is remarkable. Apart from lengthy interviews with his father, Nimmo stumbled across another rich vein of material.

And insights into how the Luftwaffe night-fighter ace managed to pull off such a lethal frenzy of destruction.

"Quite by chance I came across a page with an internet link to a German website that didn't mean a thing to me" says Nimmo, who in spite of his father's involvement has attempted to tell the story from a neutral perspective, favouring neither the British,

Germans or French.

“To my absolute amazement I found it was a recent and unexplained link to a Helmut Weitz, a Hamburg military antiquarian. And there it all was, a researcher’s dream, all of Helmut Bergmann’s original Third Reich, Luftwaffe and personal papers and photograph albums for sale at 30,000 Euros!

“This was a monumental find for my research. I had known that Bergmann’s collection existed somewhere, but had had no idea of where to start looking for it and this unexpected find was key to my book’s very existence.

“I wrote to Weitz and told him I couldn’t buy the collection — but that I would give my eye teeth to see it. His immediate and very generous offer was that I should visit Hamburg and copy anything I needed. Such high-profile papers are highly collectable and could disappear again at any moment — which they did shortly afterwards. I rushed off to Germany and to Herr Weitz’s gallery, arriving with a scanner under one arm and my laptop, notebook and a camera under the other. On climbing the stairs and entering the military gallery, it was to find an Aladdin’s cave of fearsome looking Nazi uniforms, SS caps, daggers and so on.

“As I was obviously British I drew some very odd looks. I was in awe and some shock when Helmut Weitz and his assistants produced three milk crates full of Bergmann’s Luftwaffe papers, awards, personal letters, WWII mementos and several personal photograph albums stuffed full of amazing photographs. And there were Helmut Bergmann’s flight diagrams and reports about that very night when he shot down those seven Lancasters — even the original paperwork typed by Bergmann about how he shot my own father down...

“So here I was, 11 years after my father’s death, handling these original documents containing long searched for answers to impossible questions. It was a very strange experience indeed. Everything dovetailed with my father’s story. It was the mirror image of this terrifying night. I now had everything I needed to tell the story from both sides. In all my years of television production I had never had quite such a Eureka moment!” Ironically, the much decorated Bergmann was killed with his crew when they were shot down less than four months later over the Cherbourg peninsula. Neil Nimmo, the only pilot to survive among the seven shot down, had bailed out with the rest of his crew, and survived, dying in 1992. What a story he had to tell. And what a story his son Stuart has written.

Perilous Moon: Occupied France, 1944 – The End Game is published by Casemate in the UK at £22.50 and \$34.95 in the USA.

Extract from: Legend of the Lancasters - Martin Bowman

Night Fighter Nights

As I lay there I saw a stream of sparks pass a few feet above the cockpit, from back to front and going up at a slight angle. This caused me some confusion. If the sparks were from a burning engine they were going the wrong way. It was some little time before I realized that the sparks were in fact tracer shells from a fighter that I did not know was attacking us. The illusion that the tracer shells were going upwards was no doubt caused by the fact that our Lancaster was going into an uncontrolled, screaming dive, but because of the slow-motion effect that I was experiencing, I did not appreciate this fact. This whole episode had taken 2 or 3 seconds at most, then the slow-motion effect began to wear off, and I became aware of the screams of the bomb-aimer. Lying in the bomb-aimer's position in the nose of the aircraft, he had caught the full force of the explosion, although this was not immediately apparent.

Sergeant C. H. 'Chick' Chandler, flight engineer

- 'Achtung, Achtung!'
- 'Lisa-Marie 7'-Rolf-Marie 6.
- 'Rolf'-Lisa-Marie 5'-Marie 4'-Rolf-(more).
- 'Rolf-Stop'-Marie 2'
- 'A little Lisa-(same height)-Lisa-Marie 1,
- '5-Rolf-Marie 1'
- 'A little Siegfried (climb)-Rolf-Marie 1
- 'Lisa-Lisa-Stop-Marie 0,8-a little Rolf'.

Hauptmann Helmut Bergmann listened impatiently but attentively to the long litany of instructions from his *Bordjunker* crouched in the cockpit of their Bf 110G-4 night fighter as they continued their *Helle Nachtjagd* (night chase) across the French countryside. Thirty minutes earlier the 23 year old *Staffelkapitän* had lifted the Messerschmitt with its deadly electronic wizardry and heavy firepower off from the 8./NJG 4 base at Juvincourt and he had then climbed at maximum rate to an operational height of 5,300 metres. Their route was to take them to one of the *Himmelbett Räume* (four poster bed boxes) each one of them a theoretical spot in the sky, in which one to three fighters orbited a radio beacon waiting for bombers to appear. Each box, about 20 miles square, which had names like *Hamster*, *Eisbär* (Polar Bear) and *Tiger* (around Terschelling Island), was a killing-zone in the path of hundreds of incoming prey. All approaches to occupied

Europe and Germany were divided into circular and partly overlapping areas, which took full advantage of Bomber Command's tactic in sending bombers singly and on a broad front and not in concentrated streams. The *Himmelbett Räume* and the *Nachtjäger* were orchestrated by *Jägerleitoffiziers* (JLOs or GCI-controllers) in Battle Opera Houses. Though the JLOs were far removed from the actual battles, high tiered rows of *Leuchtspukers* or 'Light Spitter girls' projected information onto a huge screen for them and operators moved the plots on the *Seeburg* plotting tables.

The *Jägerleitoffizier* announced monotonously at regular intervals, 'No *Kuriere* in sight' and Bergmann had to continue orbiting. Bergmann, who had sixteen confirmed night *Abschüsse* (victories) was impatient to add to his score and he probably did not concern himself with the bombers' destinations. The Nuremberg raid had brought, for a brief period, the virtual cessation of heavy attacks and Bomber Command seemed to mainly be focusing on transportation targets and *Luftwaffe* airfields in France and Belgium. Tonight, 10/11 April, 908 aircraft were to attack five marshalling yards, four in France and one in Belgium. Although the *Nachtjagdgeschwader* did not know the actual numbers involved, the night predators were unconcerned, satisfied in the knowledge that there would be scores of ubiquitous black 'Fat Cars' for them to aim for.

Bergmann was one of many who eagerly awaited the code word from the *Jägerleitoffizier* that would send him scurrying into action in *Krebs* his allotted box. Suddenly, as if by magic, 'Have *Kurier* for you, *Kirchturm* 10 (1,000 metres), course 300°, *Kurier* flying from two to 11' sounded in the earphones of his *Bordfunker*.

Startled but composed, the three-man crew reacted with excitement and enthusiasm. According to the information from the *Jägerleitoffizier* they were only a few kilometres behind a British bomber! The enemy aircraft had been picked up on *Würzburg* ground radar, fixed on the plotting table and transmitted to the *Hauptmann* and his crew stalking the bomber. As soon as the *Bordfunker* picked up contact on his *Lichtenstein* radar set, he transmitted 'Emil-Emil' to alert his JLO. But there was no indication yet on the *Lichtenstein*. It was 02.20 hours. They hoped to reach the 'Fat Car' before it left the range of the *Würzburg* ground radar.

'1,000 metres, 800 metres, 500, 400, 300 metres!' Power off and minimum speed in order not to overtake him, Bergmann had to attack from behind and that at the dangerous rear turret of the *Viermot*!

'There he is!'

Their eyes looked out and focused on a black shape of the Britisher. Small, bluish exhaust flames made it easier to keep the target in sight. Four engines, twin tail, were recorded almost subconsciously. No sudden movement, that might attract their attention. Calm now! Guns armed? Night sight switched on? Everything OK! Now Bergmann could see that it was an Avro Lancaster. He applied a little more power and approached him cautiously. He was exactly behind him at about 100 metres' range. The rear turret was clearly recognizable. His *Bordfunker* kept silent.

'Pauke! Pauke!' ('Kettledrums! Kettledrums!')

Bergmann had obtained visual contact of his target. It was a Lancaster, crossing gently from starboard to port. Bergmann's *Bordfunker* immediately transmitted 'Ich beruhe'. Then they closed in rapidly for the kill. The equipment was checked and the four machine guns and two MG-FF 2cm cannon were loaded and cocked. At the *Bordfunker*'s feet were ammunition drums with 75 rounds each for the pair of deadly cannon. Now the *Lichtenstein* screen was aglow with the green time base and the ground blips, which also showed their altitude.

'250, 200, 150 metres.' A slipstream shook the *Messerschmitt*. They were close!

At 100 metres Bergmann pressed the gun button on the stick and was startled at the rattle of the cannon. He stayed behind the great night bird firing and observing the projectiles striking the rear turret and the fuselage. Strikes peppered the fuselage and danced along the wing

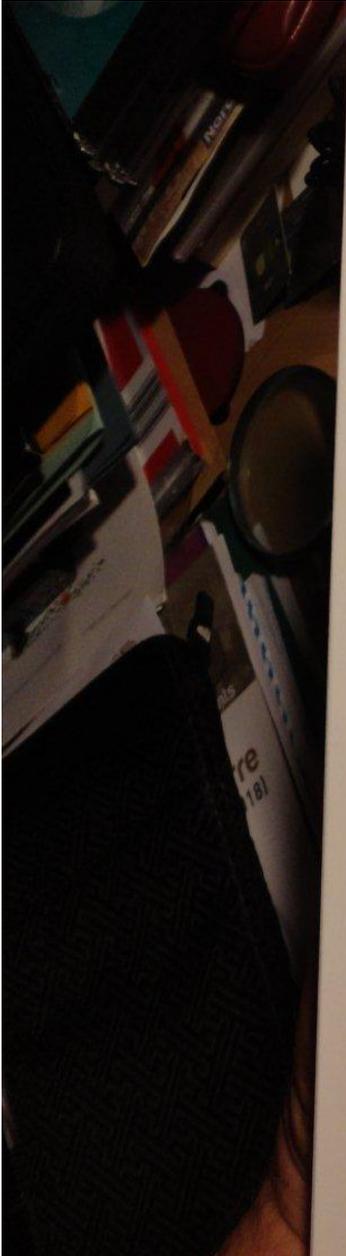
root. An equally short burst of brightly coloured tracer disappeared into the Lancaster's wing and fuselage. He must have been hit! The Lanc burst into flames. Doomed, it fell away to port in a flaming death dive, impacting in a French field near Vieux Mesnil.

'Horrido!' ('Tallyho') exclaimed Bergmann over RT to ground control to announce his first success of the night.

Bergmann twisted and turned the 110, looking for more 'Fat Cars'. Ten minutes later the crew found what they were looking for. It was another Lancaster. Another burst and it went down a few kilometres north of Salarnes. 'Horrido!' South-east of Saily five minutes later they downed yet another Lancaster. Cries of 'Horrido!' filled the airwaves once again. Bergmann's fourth victim went down to his guns north-north-west of Achiet-le-Petit. It had been only 23 minutes since the first encounter. Just seven minutes later a fifth Lancaster was destroyed in about as many seconds and fuel from its ruptured tanks ignited and lit up the night sky with a reddish hue. The stricken Lanc impacted at Beauquesne. Four minutes later Bergmann made it six. The downed Lancaster's engines buried themselves deep into the French earth near Vignacourt. North of Guignemicourt their seventh and final victim, all of them Lancasters en route to the marshalling yards at Aulnoye, went down in a screaming death dive. It was now 03.06.

Naxos and *Flensburg* equipment homing onto H₂S equipment and the *Monica* tail-warning device might have identified some, if not all, of Bergmann's victims. Bomber crews were warned about this possibility and they were instructed not to leave sets on too long but the one sided encounter with the night fighter had lasted a devastating 46 minutes, with five victims being dispatched in the first 30 minutes. It may be that the *Hauptmann* had downed some of them, if not all, or if out of ammunition, he may well have given his *Bord-schütze* free range with his two MG-FF 2cm cannon. Changing ammunition drums in a twisting and turning night fighter would have made his task almost impossible but not if the pilot pulled alongside to allow the *Bord-schütze* to blaze away. In any event all seven *Viermots* took his score to 23 and counted towards the *Staffelkapitän*'s coveted *Ritterkreuz*.²

Altogether the raids on the night of 10/11 April cost Bomber Command 19 aircraft. Greater destruction however, occurred at their targets. At Aulnoye 340 houses were destroyed or damaged in the attack on the marshalling yards and 14 French civilians were killed. At Ghent, where the Merelbeke-Melle railway yards on



the main line to Brussels were hit, losses to Belgian civilians was even greater, when bombs flattened over 580 buildings including seven schools, a convent and an orphanage and over 1,000 other buildings were damaged, causing 428 deaths and 309 injured. There was destruction too at Kirmington, where 22 Lancasters of 166 Squadron took off for the raid on Aulnoye. As the fifth Lancaster roared along the runway a few minutes after 23.00 a wing dipped. Careering to one side it lurched from the runway. Strained by the momentum of the heavy bomb load, the undercarriage collapsed and the fuselage ploughed along the ground for a few yards before coming to rest. Pilot Officer D. C. Gibbons' crew, uninjured, jumped out only just in time as it burst into flames. With all four tanks blazing the fire crew, who had raced up in their tender, realized that it was hopeless. Since the crew was safe, they withdrew to await the explosion, which so damaged the runway that it was unserviceable and the remaining 17 of the squadron's aircraft could not take-off.³

At East Kirkby Ron Walker's crew, who had just returned from leave, were one of 14 crews in 57 Squadron who bombed the St Pierre-des-Corps railway marshalling yards at Tours in bright moonlight. They had to make two bombing runs over the target before they were certain that they could aim their 13,000lb bomb loads without killing and injuring French civilians in the vicinity. The yards were seriously damaged and there were no reports of any French casualties. Walker's crew were not troubled the following day when they were on the battle order with 10 other crews to fly a night raid on Aachen in *Q-Queenie*, loaded up with 13,200lbs of high explosive. It proved a successful trip in spite of the German defences, who shot down nine Lancasters.⁴

At Coningsby since the beginning of 1944, 617 Squadron, now commanded by Wing Commander Geoffrey Leonard Cheshire DSO** DFC had successfully employed the tactic of marking and destroying small industrial targets at night, using flares dropped by a Lancaster in a shallow dive at low level. Cheshire, who was on his fourth tour, was born in 1917 at Chester and was educated at Stowe and Merton College, Oxford where he was a member of the University Air Squadron between 1937 and the outbreak of war. At 25 he had been the youngest group captain in the RAF and he had dropped back to wing commander so that he could resume bomber operations.⁵ Five years earlier he had gained an honours degree in law at Oxford and, at 24, on leave in New York, he had met and married 41 year old Constance Binney, who had been an American

movie star. In England Cheshire liked a suite at the Ritz when on leave, and to bask in The Mayfair cocktail bar.⁶ On the night of 8/9 February Cheshire had led a dozen of his Lancasters to bomb the Gnome et Rhône aero-engine factory at Limoges, 200 miles south-west of Paris. The factory was undefended except for two machine guns and Cheshire made three low-level runs in bright moonlight to warn the 300 French girls working the night shift to escape. On the fourth run he dropped a load of 30lb incendiaries from between 50 and 100 feet. Each of the other 11 Lancasters then dropped a 12,000lb bomb with great accuracy. Ten of the bombs hit the factory and an eleventh fell in the river alongside. The AOC, Air Marshal the Hon Ralph Cochrane, was quick to appreciate that if a single aircraft could mark a target accurately for a squadron then it should be possible for a squadron of properly trained crews to mark targets with similar accuracy for the whole Group. The Lancaster was vulnerable to light flak at low level and a more manoeuvrable aircraft was required for the operations Cochrane had in mind. Cheshire was aware of the limitations of the Lancaster and he had already decided the best aircraft for low level marking. He briefed the AOC on his ideas and Cochrane allocated 617 Squadron a Mosquito.

The Dam Busters' first Mosquito sortie was on 5/6 April when the seemingly fearless Cheshire and his chunky little navigator, Flying Officer Pat Kelly, marked an aircraft factory at Toulouse, on his third pass, with two red spot flares from a height of 800-1,000 feet.⁷ This led to the meeting at Bomber Command HQ, which resulted in 5 Group – the Independent Air Force, as it was known in Bomber Command – receiving its own PFF force with 8 Group no longer enjoying its hitherto unchallenged monopoly over pathfinder tactics. Nos. 83 and 97 Lancaster Squadrons moved, from their respective Pathfinder bases at Wyton and Bourn, to Coningsby to rejoin 5 Group, as backers-up and 617 Squadron and 627 Mosquito Squadrons were redeployed from Coningsby and Oakington respectively to Woodhall Spa. The two PFF Lancaster squadrons did not like the idea of marking being undertaken by the Mosquitoes. They saw themselves being reduced to 'flare carrying' forces. Mosquito crews stunned into silence by the news that the new task would be 'dangerous' and 'possibly, not altogether effective' were struck by a feeling of 'grim foreboding' that settled on the squadron 'like a patch of low stratus'. It soon became apparent that they were very much the poor relations at Woodhall. While the famous Dambusters 'lorded it' in Perwood House, 627 were relegated to a batch of Nissen huts on the far side of the airfield. Their

DESCRIPTION OF THE CRASH OF LANCASTER LL836

ACHIET LE PETIT 11/12 April 1944

Testimony of Mr. Jacques HOURIEZ (Born 07/02/1931) August 21st 2014

Mr. Houriez explains that during the night of April 11th to 12th there was no sound of an explosion, but while on his way to school on the morning of the 12th, it was obvious that there had been a plane crash near Logeast wood not far from the village. With other students he went to the scene of the fall.

Once there, they discovered the wreckage scattered over a large area. The plane appeared to have attempted to land because parts were scattered but not buried. They saw at first an engine half buried into the earth, beside it lay the body of an airman who was « printed » in the ground, his arms outstretched. Further on, there was a large piece of plane, beside which lay a mutilated body; when the Germans arrived they collected the remains of the airman on a piece of sheet metal from the plane and they identified the body as Sgt Williams. His parachute was open and he was still attached. The pilot, Flight Lieutenant Picton was still on command, his body inside the plane was charred but you would have thought he had tried to eject the canopy as a hand sticking out of the cockpit was white.

Intact but charred, the 5 other crew members bodies were scattered over the site. Accessories were spread to the scene of the accident. M Houriez found a leather flight helmet equipped with headphones that he kept for a long time but lost thereafter. Students picked up other pieces of crew's equipment as mementos, and adults were looking for electrical parts they could have used (such as dynamos). The father of M Houriez had recovered a piece of wood he used as a pitchfork handle. The only problem was that when he used the tool, he had black hands because the wood was charred to some depth. Mr Langagne, the teacher found a denture that he put in a handkerchief.

Some students picked up and ate candies they found on the crash site, but they didn't know they were "wakey wakey" pills (amphetamines, usually the Benzidrine which helped the crew to stay awake during their mission). The following day, the children who ate the "candies" were no longer able to sleep. Their parents alerted the teacher (M Langagne) who went to talk to the village doctor (Dr Michel) who explained to them the real cause of their hyperactivity.

Then, the Germans arrived on the scene and took care to collect the remains of the plane and the bodies. They take the bodies to a shelter near a local church, adjacent to the town hall, which was used at the time as a

prison. The mayor of Achiet Le Petit at the time, Mr Valle, then intervened to prevent the bodies being buried too quickly. He insisted on a decent burial to be carried out and for the bodies to be placed in coffins. Finally the German officer accepted the request of Mr Valle, and the bodies were placed in white wood coffins.

The day of the funeral the coffins were taken on one trailer, a priest was present but there was no mass there. All students from the schools followed the procession with a bunch of flowers in hands, there were a lot of people, people from the town and from the surrounding villages. At the cemetery the Germans fired two volleys to honour the crew.



M. Jacques Houriez



Grave of crew of LL836 – September 2014

19 Avril 1944 Achet. Le Petit - Bois de Lognost - 1

M: raconte : Peu avant 3 heures, j'avais perçu le passage d'un avion et au roulement des moteurs, il me paraissait que l'appareil était en difficulté et peu après, j'avais pu entendre nettement une explosion.

Pourvu des f^s François que ce ne soit pas l'avion, entendu que le soit éclaté et qui brûlait - Hélas ce n'était pas une habitation en flammes, c'était bien lui - Bets se passait au "chauffeur" près du bois de Lognost -

Devant les gens du village qui, s'étant rendus compte de l'accident se dirigeaient en hâte vers le lieu des débris, des allemands du Terrain de grillons ^{venant par un véhicule} empêchaient les civils d'approcher et montraient une garde sévère.

Bets sous les flammes cesseront et j'vis que c'était un quadricycle motor qui avait explosé en l'air.

L'après midi, ayant appris que les 2 allemands restés auprès des débris de l'avion, n'empêchaient plus les civils d'approcher, de regarder - J'allais à nouveau voir -

Triste spectacle! Les corps des infortunés avotars (si je puis encore employer le mot "Corps") étaient éparpillés sur le sol - Le corps du bombardier était enfoncé dans le sol avec l'un des moteurs - Les 3 autres, par la force de l'explosion avaient été projetés à plus de 200 mètres de là -

J'ai constaté une multitude de des roues tordues, affalées ailleurs des hélices enroulées, des tubes brisés, des bandes de caoutchouc, des parachutes à demi brûlés, des débris de bois, des fragments de métal.

Un Feldwebel qui parlait assez bien le français me dit "C'est un bombardier que j'ai vu Canadien - Il avait

2

5 bord 9 hommes. 7 ont été tués et 2 autres ont été grièvement blessés. Nous les avons transportés à l'hôpital d'Aras les tués, nous les avons réunis. Ils sont dans un petit endroit (sic) à côté de l'église car l'avion est tombé sur le territoire de votre village.

Sur les 7, 4 ont encore une forme humaine, les 3 autres n'ont plus de corps. Nous les avons retirés de dessous l'appareil. Ils ont été carbonisés. Nous avons eu beaucoup de mal pour les avoir. Les autres étaient tombés autour de l'avion, et à plus de 100 mètres.

Est ce que l'avion avait été touché par des balles, des obus? lui demandais je.

Je ne le pense pas, répondit l'Allemand, j'ai tout bien examiné je suis ingénieur dans l'aviation. Je crois que les réservoirs de carburant ont pris feu. Après les aviateurs n'ont pas eu le temps de sauter en parachute. Peut être que le pilote n'avait pu voir et s'effondra à cet endroit.

En me regardant et me prenant la main il me dit "C'est triste la guerre!" et après un moment de silence il ajouta: "J'ai un père qui est mort comme cela."

Avez vous les noms des aviateurs demandais je?

Je n'ai pu trouver que 2 noms me répondit il.

Qu'allez vous faire des corps transportés à Schest le Petit?

Je ne sais pas encore ajouta t il. Je vais venir me rapporter à mon chef à la Kommandantur à Bihucourt. Je lui ai dit que j'avais trouvé sur les corps de 3 aviateurs et que j'ai les noms, un scolastique et une image de la vierge sans doute les autres en portaient aussi? Ce sont des catholiques je pense. Je suis catholique et mon chef aussi, et alors?

2

5 bord 9 hommes. 7 ont été tués et 2 autres ont été grièvement blessés. Nous les avons transportés à l'hôpital d'Aras les tués, nous les avons réunis. Ils sont dans un petit endroit (sic) à côté de l'église car l'avion est tombé sur le territoire de votre village.

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Translator's Note - As last time, I'll aim for a happy medium between a verbatim translation and something that reads like proper English. The original jumps about a bit in terms of tenses, but I've just gone for consistency. The numbers in brackets refer to my footnotes!!!

Document 1

12th April 1944 Achiet le Petit Logeast Wood

M _____ recalls:

A little before 3 o'clock I noticed a plane flying over and, from the howling of the engines, it seemed to me that it was in difficulties, and shortly afterwards I clearly heard an explosion.

"Let's hope" I said to François, "that it wasn't the plane I heard that has crashed and is burning". Alas, it wasn't a home that was in flames, it was, indeed, the plane. (1) This happened at the "chauffour" (2) near Logeast Wood.

The villagers, who had become aware of the accident, headed rapidly towards the site of the disaster. Some Germans, having come from Terrain de Grevillers by vehicle, arrived before them. They prevented the civilians from approaching, and mounted a military guard.

About 7 o'clock the flames died down and I saw that it was a four engined plane that had exploded in the air.

In the afternoon, having ascertained that the two Germans who had stayed by the aircraft debris were no longer preventing civilians from approaching to have a look, I went for another view.

What a sad sight! The bodies of the unfortunate airmen (if I can use the word "body" again)(3) were scattered on the ground. The body of the bombardier was driven into the ground, with one of the engines. The three others, due to the force of the explosion, had been thrown more than 200 metres away. Here was a machine gun, there twisted wheels, flattened elsewhere were reinforced (4) propellers, crushed tubes, strips of rubber, half burned parachutes, wooden debris, pools of charred remains (5).

(6)

A German sergeant who spoke French quite well said to me, "It's a bomber that I think is Canadian. It had 9 men on board – 7 were killed and 2 others were gravely injured. We've taken them to the hospital in Arras, the dead we have recovered. They are in the little place (sic) next to the church, as the plane touched down on your village's land. Of the 7, 4 still have a human form; the 3 others no longer have a body. We have recovered them from beneath the aircraft. They have been reduced to ashes. We had a lot of difficulty recovering them. The others fell around the aircraft, more than a hundred metres away."

"Had the plane been hit by bullets or shells?" I asked him.

"I don't think so," replied the German. "I examined everything thoroughly. I am an aviation engineer. (7) I think the fuel tanks caught fire. Taken by surprise, the airmen did not have time to parachute out. Perhaps the pilot thought he would be able to land, but then the explosion occurred."

In replying to me, and taking my hand, he said to me, "War is sad!", and, after a moment's silence, he added, "I had a brother who died like that."

"Do you have the names of the airmen?" I asked.

"I've only been able to find two names", he replied.

"What are you going to do with the bodies transported to Achiet le Petit?"

“I don’t know yet”, he said. “I’ve submitted my report to HQ at Bihucourt(?). I’ve told them that I’ve found a scapular (8) and an image of the Virgin on the bodies of the two airmen whose names I’ve found. No doubt the others were carrying them too. I think they are Catholics. I am a Catholic as well, and so is my boss. So? They could be buried by the church?”

As I was thanking the sergeant, and about to take my leave of him, a German cyclist arrived. Having got off his bike, clicked his heels and saluted his superior, he gave him a folded piece of paper.

I was drawing back and moving away, taking with me, as a souvenir, a piece of parachute, when the sergeant called me back.

“The boss at HQ, a Catholic, as I told you, has authorised burial by the church.

Tomorrow, Wednesday, at 4pm, on the strict condition that there should be no outward show (9), no flowers. The airmen will be placed in the same grave. As soon as my comrades come to relieve me, I’ll go and tell the village mayor, so that he can warn the priest.

I thanked the sergeant and returned to Achiet, very moved.

- (1) This seems like an odd thing to have said, but I’m pretty sure that’s what the text says – perhaps the thought was that, at least from a burning house, there would be a greater likelihood that people would escape.
- (2) This was in inverted commas in the original, so I presume it is a local name for the location – I certainly can’t find a sensible translation.
- (3) I don’t really understand this bit, unless it refers to some previous account that you don’t have – why “again”?
- (4) This was one of the two words I couldn’t really decipher – this is my best guess.
- (5) This was the other bit I couldn’t decipher – the pools were certainly not blood or aviation fuel, so I guess it must be patches of charred debris, as I think the beginning of the word is maybe “carbon...”
- (6) This next section is reported as direct speech, so that’s how I’ve translated it – though, presumably, it’s not the exact words used.
- (7) This could also be translated as “aeronautical engineer”, but I guess that if he had such levels of expertise, he would have been stationed elsewhere, where his skills could have been more usefully employed. Unless, of course – a thought that has just struck me as I typed that – his specific job was to inspect and report on Allied aircraft that came down in that part of France, technologies etc. I’m a bit slow on the uptake, I expect.
- (8) You went to a Catholic school, so you’ll know more about this than I do!
- (9) This could also be translated as “demonstration”, but I thought that was less likely.

2

à bord 9 hommes - 7 ont été tués et 2 autres ont été grièvement blessés - Nous les avons transportés à l'hôpital d'Aras les tués, nous les avons réunis - Ils sont dans un petit endroit (sic) à côté de l'église car l'avion est tombé sur le territoire de votre village.

Sur les 7, 4 ont encore une forme humaine, les 3 autres n'ont plus de corps - Nous les avons retirés de dessous l'appareil.

Ils ont été carbonisés - Nous avons eu beaucoup de mal pour les avoir - les autres étaient tombés autour de l'avion, et à plus de 100 mètres.

Est ce que l'avion avait été touché par des balles, des obus ? lui demandais je.

Je ne le pense pas, répondit l'Allemand, j'ai tout bien examiné je suis ingénieur dans l'aviation - Je crois que les réservoirs de carburant ont pris feu - Surpris les aviateurs n'ont pas eu le temps de sauter en parachute - Peut être que le pilote a cru pouvoir se poser et l'explosion s'est alors produite.

En me regardant et me prenant la main il me dit "C'est triste la guerre!" et après un moment de silence il ajoute : "J'ai un frère qui est mort comme cela -"

Avez vous les noms des aviateurs demandais je ?

Je n'ai pu trouver que 2 noms me répondit il -

Qu'allez vous faire des corps transportés à Schest-le-Petit ?

Je ne sais pas encore ajouta t il - J'ai remis mes rapports à mon chef à la Kommandantur à Bihucourt - J'ai dit que j'avais trouvé sur les corps de 2 aviateurs deux fais les noms, une scapulaire et une image de la vierge sans doute les autres en portaient aussi ? Ce sont des catholiques je pense - Je suis catholique et mon chef aussi, et alors ?

3

- ou pourrait les enterrer par l'épée?
Comme je remerciais le Feldwebel et que j'allais prendre congé
de lui, un cycliste allemand arriva. Après être descendu de vélo
chaqué les talons, salué son supérieur, il lui remit un pli.
Je m'écartais et allais m'éloigner, emportant comme souvenir
un morceau de parachute, quand le Feldwebel me rappela:

"Le Chef de la Kommandantur, un catholique comme je vous l'ai dit
autorise l'enterrement par l'épée Demain ~~Jeudi~~ Mercredi à
16h00, à la condition formelle qu'il ne se déroule pas de
manifestation, pas de fleurs. Les aviateurs seront placés dans la
meilleure fosse - J'vais tout à l'heure, quand mon Camarade
sera venu me remplacer, aller le dire au Maire du village, ainsi
il pourra avoir un prêtre.

Je remerciais le Feldwebel et retournais à Schuet, très ému

12

12 Avril 1944

Arrest le Petit

À 15h00, 7 cercueils peints en Roux, fournis par l'autorité allemande, sont amenés devant la dépendance municipale où les ardeurs avaient été amenés. Aidés par quelques volontaires, le garde champêtre déposa les corps tels qu'ils avaient été retrouvés sur le lieu du drame dans les cercueils qui furent aussitôt conduits dans l'église, face à la balustrade.

À 16h00, après une sonnerie de cloches très courte, l'abbé CORNET curé de Pithecourt, procéda à la cérémonie religieuse avec des chants de passage de l'office des Morts accompagnés par l'harmonium.

L'église était comble. Des gens étaient venus de tous les villages voisins. Beaucoup furent contraints de rester ^{en} dehors du lieu saint, pourtant l'église était spacieuse. Les feldweibels représentaient le Commandantier.

Quel calme! Quel recueillement dans l'église! Quel silence! Une prière fut effectuée durant le "Dies. Irae" pour dédommager la fête.

À l'issue de l'office, devant la porte, les corps furent amenés au chariot faisant office de corbillard. Il s'agissait d'un chariot à roues caoutchoutées propriété de M^{me} Richard Languelle. Il était attelé à 2 chevaux à la robe usée. Le convoi s'éleva ensuite. Enfants de chœur en tertiaire nous dont l'un porta le corps, le père, le corbillard la foule nombreuse, calme, recueillie, émue. Pas un mot. Les chants se percevaient nettement et, dans un ciel quelques peu nuageux le soleil brille. Les cloches sont muettes.

Par la Rue de l'église, la Rue Jean Deques, lentement, comme à pas comptés, on gagne le Cimetière. À l'entrée, le chariot s'arrête un à un les 7 cercueils sont descendus. Des hommes, 4 par

Cercueil les prennent et les portent au bord de la fosse commune creusée par²
le fossoyeur Joseph LECOMTE. Ce sont maintenant les ultimes adieux.
Le prêtre, d'une voix que l'émotion rend tremblante, récite les dernières prières.
Ensuite les cercueils sont descendus dans la fosse. Les 2 fidèles
sont au garde à vous et ils saluent.

Le prêtre bénit les cercueils, récite le DE PROFUNDIS, puis se tournant vers les
assistants il demande que tous, nous récitons une dizaine de chapelet
pour l'âme de ces braves tombés au champ d'honneur.

Après avoir béni une dernière fois les cercueils, le prêtre d'un geste large
bénit la foule et à nouveau les 7 corps

La cérémonie finie, touchante dans sa simplicité est terminée.

Chacun se retire - le fossoyeur comble la fosse

Ce jour là, aucune fleur, mais le lendemain la Tombe des Français.
- Saît sous les bouquets.

Par les soins de la Commandantur de Bihucourt, une croix fut
plantée au milieu de la Tombe - Croix blanche aux bords noirs.

Dans les jours qui suivirent, des habitants entourèrent la
Tombe de perennes, plantèrent des œillets, réparèrent des
faquerelles, des penelles. La Tombe fut toujours bien entretenue.

Document 2

12th April 1944 Achiet le Petit

At 3 o'clock, 7 coffins painted rust colour (1) and provided by the German authorities, were delivered in front of the municipal prison where the airmen had been taken.

Assisted by some volunteers, the village policeman placed those bodies that had been recovered at the site of the crash into the coffins, which were taken straight into the church and placed opposite the altar rail. (2)

At 4 o'clock, after a very brief peal of the bells, Father CORNET, priest of Bihucourt, began the religious ceremony with the singing of passages from the Office for the Dead, accompanied by the harmonium.

The church was packed. People had come from many neighbouring villages. Many were forced to stay outside, even though the church was spacious. Two sergeants represented German HQ.

What calm! What reflection in the church! What silence! A collection was taken during the Dies Irae, to pay the priest.

At the end of the service, in front of the door, the bodies were taken out to the cart which was serving as a hearse. It was a cart with rubberised wheels, owned by Mme Richard Lauguille. It was hitched up to two black horses. Then the cortege moved off. Children from the choir, in black soutanes, one of them carrying the cross; the priest; the grave digger; the large crowd, calm, contemplative, moved. Not a word. The singing could be heard clearly and in a somewhat cloudy sky the sun shone. The bells were silent.

Along Rue de l'Eglise, Rue Jean Decques, slowly, at a measured pace, we reached the cemetery. At the entrance, the cart stopped and one by one the seven coffins were lowered down. Some men, four to each coffin, took them and carried them to the communal grave, dug by the grave digger Joseph LECOMTE. It was now time for the final farewells. The priest, in a voice trembling with emotion, recited the final prayers. One by one the coffins were lowered into the grave. The two German sergeants were standing to attention and saluted.

The priest blessed the coffins and recited the De Profundis, and then, turning to all those present, asked them all to say ten rosaries for the souls of these brave men killed in action.

Having blessed the coffins one last time, the priest, in a sweeping gesture, blessed the crowd and the seven bodies again.

The funeral ceremony, touching in its simplicity, was over. Everyone moved away. The grave digger filled in the grave.

That day there was not a single flower, but the next day the grave disappeared under posies. (3) Through the care of German HQ in Bihucourt, a cross was erected in the centre of the grave – a white cross with black borders.

Over the following days, the villagers surrounded the grave with periwinkles, planted carnations, planted out daisies and pansies. (4) The grave was always well cared for.

- (1) This doesn't tally with your eye witness account – I think you'd been told that the coffins were white – but I'm sure this is what it says.
- (2) I struggled with this – the dictionary gives "balustrade" or "railing", so I've guessed at "altar rail" as the most likely meaning.
- (3) This can also translate as bunches of flowers, but I thought that posies worked better – I like to imagine the children of the village picking wild spring flowers and bringing them to the grave.

(4) In case you can't make it out in the original, the French for pansies is pensées – which I think is rather lovely, especially in this context.

Letter from Joyce Hrywkiw to the Mayor of Achiet le Petit

30 Novembre 2004,

Aux Achiétois,

Au nom de la famille de l'officier pilote William Essar (mon oncle Bill), je voudrais remercier les gens de votre village pour le soin que vous avez pris des tombes de mon oncle et des 6 autres officiers pendant ces 60 dernières années.

Quand l'avion de mon oncle s'est écrasé, on a dit à notre famille qu'il était mort quelque part en France, mais ils n'avaient aucune idée de l'endroit où il avait été enterré, ni même s'il avait été enterré. Mes grands-parents savaient donc qu'il était mort en France, mais même si on leur avait dit où, cela n'aurait pas eu beaucoup de sens pour eux puisque c'était à une très grande distance, à l'autre bout du monde et ils n'auraient de toute façon jamais l'occasion de s'y rendre. Deux jours après l'annonce de sa mort, ils reçurent une lettre de mon oncle Bill dans laquelle il leur annonçait qu'il n'avait plus que deux missions avant de rentrer à la maison. Nous ne savons pas si la mission durant laquelle il est mort était l'avant dernière ou la dernière. Pendant ces 60 dernières années, ce sont les seules informations dont les membres de la famille ont disposé. Comme le disait ma tante (sa sœur) : « Je regardais sa photo et me demandais : Bill, où es-tu ? »

L'été dernier, mon fils m'a demandé si j'aimerais faire un voyage aux Pays-Bas et en Belgique avec lui, sa famille et sa belle-mère. En planifiant les étapes, il m'a demandé s'il y avait quelque chose que j'aimerais faire ou voir. Je lui ai dit que si nous étions suffisamment près, j'aimerais beaucoup trouver la tombe d'oncle Bill. Donc, quand nous sommes allés en Belgique, l'endroit le plus proche de la France durant notre voyage, et grâce aux informations que nous avions trouvées sur le site de la War Graves Commission, nous sommes partis à la recherche de votre village et de votre cimetière. Nous avons visité le cimetière pendant un petit moment et nous avons pris quelques photos avant de partir et je ne crois pas que quelqu'un ait su que nous étions passé, mais un c'était un dimanche matin et nous ne savions pas vraiment où aller ou qui aller voir. C'est pour cela que je vous écris cette lettre de remerciement. Jusqu'à maintenant, je suis le seul membre de la famille à avoir pu me rendre sur sa tombe.

Depuis mon retour et avec l'aide de ma belle-fille, nous avons élaboré un livret en mémoire de mon oncle pour ma mère et ses sœurs. Elles ont été très émues et heureuses de voir que leur frère repose en paix. Cela les a soulagé.

Je vous envoie une copie de ce livret. Je ne sais pas si vous avez des archives, mais mon mari (un ancien militaire) et moi avons pensé que vous apprécieriez peut-être d'en avoir un exemplaire. Vous pouvez me voir sur les photos, debout derrière la tombe de mon oncle.

Je vous envoie également 2 drapeaux canadiens et je vous demande de les placer sur les tombes de mon oncle Bill et de l'autre officier canadien, J. Potter (tombe n°3). Nous apprécierions, si possible, que vous preniez des photos et que vous nous les fassiez parvenir, je pourrai ainsi les ajouter au livret. Nous vous serions également reconnaissants de nous faire parvenir toute information, si vous en avez, sur les circonstances et les événements concernant le crash de l'avion, l'enterrement... Nous apprécierions vraiment la moindre information. Il nous a été difficile de ne pas connaître les détails de sa disparition.

Merci encore à tous au nom de toute la famille d'avoir pris soin de notre fils, frère, oncle et grand-oncle.

Amicalement,

Joyce Hrywkiw.
Canada.

Document 3 – Translation of letter from Joyce Hrywkiw to the Mayor of Achiet le Petit.

30th November 2004

To the people of Achiet,

In the name of the family of Pilot Officer William Essar (my Uncle Bill), I would like to thank the people of your village for the care that you have taken of the graves of my uncle and the 6 other officers, over the last 60 years.

When my uncle's plane crashed, our family was told that he had died somewhere in France, but they had no idea of the place where he had been buried, or even if he had been buried. So my grandparents knew that he had died in France, but even if they had been told where, it would not have meant much to them as it was so far away, on the other side of the world, and they wouldn't, anyway, have had the opportunity to go there. Two days after the announcement of his death, they received a letter from my Uncle Bill, in which he told them that he had only two more missions before returning home. We do not know whether the mission in which he died was the penultimate, or his last. For the last 60 years that is all the information the family had. As my aunt, his sister, used to say, "I used to look at his photo and ask myself, Bill, where are you?" Last summer, my son asked me if I would like to go on a trip to the Netherlands and Belgium, with him, his family and his mother-in-law. In planning the stages of the journey, he asked me if there was anything I would like to do or see. I told him that, if we were close enough, I would very much like to find my Uncle Bill's grave. So when we went to Belgium, the nearest place to France on our trip, and thanks to the information we had found on the web site of the War Graves Commission, we set off in search of your village and your cemetery. We visited the cemetery for a quiet moment and we took a few photographs before we left. I don't think anyone would have known that we had been, but it was a Sunday morning and we didn't really know where to go or who to go and see. That is why I am writing you this letter of thanks. So far, I am the only member of my family who has been able to go to the grave.

Since my return, and with the help of my daughter-in-law, we have put together a booklet in memory of my uncle, for my mother and his sisters. They have been very moved and happy to see that their brother is resting in peace. It has consoled them. I am sending you a copy of this booklet. I don't know if you have an archive, but my husband (a former military man) and I thought that you might appreciate having an example of one. You can see me on the photos, standing behind my uncle's grave. I am also sending you two Canadian flags and ask you to place them on the graves of my Uncle Bill and the other Canadian officer, J. Potter (grave no.3). We would appreciate it if you could possibly take some photos and send them so that I could add them to the booklet. We would also be grateful if you could send us all the information, if you have it, about the circumstances and events of the crash, the burial... We would really appreciate the least bit of information. It has been difficult for us not knowing the details of his disappearance.

Thank you again to everyone, in the name of all my family, for having taken care of our son, brother, uncle and great uncle.

Translations of French –English texts by Linda Kneale



Achiet le Petit Cemetery September 2014 – Grave of LL836 crew





