



# ROUNDEL



December 2019

The Swiss Branch Newsletter

## Plateau des Daines 2019

Alain L. Dardelin



Plateau des Daines 2019, a place and a year to commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of two events which marked the local and national history for ever: the arrest of *Résistant* Charles Blanc and the liberation of Haute-Savoie.

Charles Blanc was arrested by the Gestapo at Perpignan train station caught while ferrying four airmen to Spain. He was to be executed on 7 April 1944 at La Doua near Lyon. Following the Provence landings, the Resistance carried out bold actions and achieved the liberation of the Haute-Savoie and the Frangy area on 19 August 1944.

The presence of a large group of school children and the well-represented *Fanfare des Ussets* meant the usual line of standard bearers was broken in two, but this did not alter the solemnity of the ceremony.



Mr. Philippe Ricoeur, President of *Souvenir Français* (Frangy) opened the ceremony with a short speech followed by the school children singing *Les Allobroges*.

More speeches recalling the actions undertaken by men and women who contributed to the Liberation often at the expense of their lives were delivered by Mr. André



Blanc, grandson of Charles and Laurence

Blanc and Mr. Michel Ricoeur.

The band played *God Save the Queen* before the laying of wreaths by Graham Robertson for RAFA and Messrs. Ricoeur and André Blanc for *Souvenir Français*. After this, *La Marseillaise* was played followed by a minute silence.



The children accompanied by the band gave a second rendition of *Les Allobroges*. At this moment I led the standard bearers party off the grounds before disbanding and gathering for the traditional *vin d'honneur* offered by the municipality.

However, this was not the end for seven of us who retired to the Auberge du Pralet (under new management) in Chaumont for a nice lunch.

RAFA members and friends Graham and Di Robertson, Régis Pizot were in attendance.

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## Montcony – 20 October 2019.

By Alan Baker

Unlike in 2018, very heavy rain preceded our arrival in the tiny village of Montcony. Nevertheless, providence



intervened, the rain gradually abated – at least during the morning – and umbrellas could be furled again.

Some 16 Members of the Lyon and Swiss Branches assembled, as usual, outside the old village school, now closed and its exterior used for car parking. We were quite overwhelmed again by the large number of standards brought to the event by *anciens combattants* representing a wide area of the Bresse area and beyond.

As always, the march from school to church to memorial and back was well-organised by our French hosts, the sudden influx of over one hundred people to a sleepy village causing local traffic some surprise and even consternation. Several young Gendarmes did their best to divert this traffic. Wreaths were laid, including

those of RAFA, and brief speeches of commemoration were made. Standing out for his resilience in attending and wreath-laying at this annual event was Mon-



sieur “Bob” Fichet, a former Resistance member who witnessed the Halifax crash and thereafter attended the crew’s funeral.

Following the traditional *vin d’honneur*, many of the French and British representatives stayed on to enjoy

another superb lunch. Readers may recall times gone by when all catering was prepared in the tiny café in a nearby hamlet and rushed to the Montcony village hall, course by course. The long lunches that followed called



for a new approach after that café burned down. We now enjoy the professional services of a *Traiteur* and cooking performed on the premises.

Visiting France and mixing with local people is always a pleasant experience. Whilst the cherry on the Montcony cake is most certainly the quality of its lunch, the opportunity to share in this local reflection of the *Entente Cordiale* is especially comforting to British nationals during currently volatile times.

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### A Second World War mystery solved: 75 years later, a transatlantic team retraces two lost Canadians’ final days

Bryan Pattison and Margaret Duff were invited by the Mayor of Saint-Sauveur in Meurthe-and-Moselle Department to represent the European Area at the inauguration of a monument in memory of the crew of a 622 Squadron Lancaster that crashed in a wood in north-east France 75 years ago.



Monday 29 July 2019 dawned bright and clear and some 300 people assembled in the woods at *La Fourchue-Eau* site of the memorial a few hundred metres from the crash site. Apart from local dignitaries several family members were present as well as the Sous-Préfet, the Commandant of the French Air Base 133 at Nancy-Ochey with a French Air Force Guard of Honour, an RAF Wing Commander representing HM Ambassa-

dor to France and a Flight Lieutenant navigator of 622 Squadron from RAF Brize Norton.

Speeches were made at the site before the monument was unveiled and wreaths laid including one on behalf of the European Area and the ceremony culminated with a low-level fly past by a pair of French Mirage jets.

We then moved to the *Maison de Forêt* for well-earned shade and refreshments and more speeches including one by Bryan. The *Maison de Forêt* houses an interesting museum about the crash.

Lancaster L7576 of 622 Sqn took off from Mildenhall on its 99<sup>th</sup> mission at about 10 pm on 28 July 1944, joined 496 aircraft from Bomber Group 3 over southern England and headed for a mass raid on Stuttgart's railway



yards. L7576 was menaced along its route by German fighters from bases near Paris, Châteaudun, Orléans, Saint-Dizier and Strasbourg until finally a fighter flown by Walter Swoboda from a base near Stuttgart engaged it. The pilot employed an evasive corkscrew manoeuvre to fend off the attack but crashed at about 1.30 am near the Vosges mountains close to the village of Saint-Sauveur. This was Swoboda's only kill – he did not survive the war. L7576 was one of 62 planes that went down that night.

Four of the seven crew members were Canadian, including the pilot, Harold Sherman (Al) Peabody, and his navigator, James Harrington (Harry) Doe. Three of the crew were killed, one taken prisoner and hospitalised, one escaped, but the mystery surrounded the lot of the pilot and navigator who were reported killed in the wreck but their bodies were never found, and their families weren't convinced the results of the official post war investigation were accurate – all the more so since various witnesses claimed that two airmen in Allied uniforms were seen alive shortly after the crash. Where did they go, and why did they never make it



home? It took their family, amateur historians and students on two continents to finally figure that out

Did Peabody and Doe really survive? If so, how, and what happened to them?

Pierre Vinot was one of the first local residents to reach the L7576 crash site. His story – and his grainy black-and-white photos – provided some of the first clues that Peabody and Doe did not die when the plane slammed into a forested hillside in the Vosges mountains. The son of a forestry warden, he was 17 in the summer of 1944 and remembers a policeman banging on the door early on the morning of July 29, a Saturday. Several locals had reported seeing an aircraft in flames streak across the night sky, and the policeman was raising a search-and-rescue party.

Young Pierre grabbed his primitive box camera, a French-made Gap, and they scrambled up the hill. When Pierre arrived, he saw that the bomber had been destroyed. "I saw two dead – they were all in one piece – and another one who was dismembered," he says. "Dogs were eating this third man." There was no sign of the other four crew members and the cockpit was empty.

The villagers also noted a crucial detail: L7576's bombs had not exploded. That observation would later help cast doubt on the official report, delivered after the war, that said Peabody and Doe were probably blown to pieces in the crash. That report might have remained the final word on the tragedy, if not for two of Peabody's relatives, Jon and Robert Peck. Jon Peck runs a mining technology company in Montreal. His brother Robert is a career diplomat who, most recently, was Canada's ambassador to Greece. Together, the brothers Peck revived and financed an investigation into Peabody's fate – the Peabody Project – which began in earnest in 2016.

French civilians found several parachutes near the crash site as well as open tins of food, more evidence that some of the missing crewmen had survived. The fathers of Peabody and Doe clung to reports from local civilians that





two airmen were picked up by the Germans.

An intriguing reference from an out-of-print book called *Viombois*, written by a Vosges-area resistance fighter named René Ricatte said that on July 30, 1944 – the day after the Lancaster crash – one of Mr. Ricatte’s men heard about the downed plane. This man reported that “part of the crew parachuted out and two of the members, arrested by the Germans, were shot on the spot.” There were no details, no names, no sources. But the reference raised the possibility that the official reports were wrong, that Mr. Peabody and Mr. Doe were not killed in the crash but were possibly executed the next day, in violation of the Geneva Convention. But it was only a theory.

The RAF’s Missing Research and Enquiry Service (MRES), set up in 1944 to trace the 42,000 airmen listed as missing, sent a two-man team to Petitmont in 1947 to research the crash of L7576. The investigation was rushed. The investigators could not verify the report that two airmen were seen walking along a road after the crash. They concluded that Peabody and Doe “either drifted over the then German border during their parachute descent and were apprehended there, or were still in the aircraft when it exploded and were blown to pieces.”

Only three bodies were found at the wreckage site. Given the rugged terrain, it’s impossible to imagine that Peabody and Doe, if they did not bail out, could have survived the impact. The plane was utterly destroyed.

Sixty-five years later a team of researchers started afresh. Their research would lead them to the Nazis’ infamous Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp, the only concentration and extermination camp on French soil located near the French border, about 50 kilometres south of Strasbourg.

The research students determined that the MRES team, which had spent only one day on their probe, missed key witnesses, a few of whom had seen the parachutes not far from the crash site.

Crucially, they unearthed a thorough report from the British Army’s War Crime Investigations Team (WCIT), whose men interviewed former Allied prisoners, German prison guards and Nazi war criminals who had operated in the Vosges mountains. Their research, although only peripherally about the fates of Peabody and Doe, determined that three airmen were taken to Struthof, where they were executed after being placed in a nearby prisoner transit camp called Schirmeck-Vorbruck.

The identity of one of the three was known. He was Sergeant Fredrick Habgood, a British Lancaster crewman whose plane went down only minutes after Mr. Peabody’s and crashed not far away. A war crimes trial determined that Sgt. Habgood was taken to Struthof on July 31, 1944, where he was hanged, and his body cremated. Circumstances – timing, geography and credible witness reports from camp prisoners and German officers and soldiers – strongly suggested the other two were Mr. Peabody and Mr. Doe.

**The Team:**

Editor, John Hannon, roving reporter, Alain Dardelin, photographers, Régis Pizot and Simone Meyer, contributing reporters and lifesavers, Alan Baker, Margaret Duff, Bryan Pattison and Graham Robertson.

We regret to announce the passing of the following Members:

- Aymon de Blonay
- Ken Lowe

A guard at Schirmeck-Vorbruck told the WCIT investigators that he saw an airman resembling Peabody. The WCIT team interrogated the British flight engineer who had bailed out of the Lancaster and was imprisoned by the Germans. He asked his German interrogator about the rest of his crew. "They were all incinerated," he was told, adding weight to the WCIT's theory that Peabody and Doe were executed along with Sgt. Habgood and burned in Struthof's crematorium.

They found an unrelated deposition from the commander of the Schirmeck-Vorbruck transfer camp, who told a war crimes court that orders were given from above that captured airmen were to be killed, not treated as prisoners of war. The commander admitted sending three airmen to Struthof at the end of July and early August.

After examining all the evidence, especially the WCIT report and the criminal depositions from German camp commanders, they concluded that Peabody and Doe were indeed taken to Struthof within a few days of the crash and were killed and cremated. The brothers Peck have accepted this conclusion and consider the Peabody mystery essentially solved.

F/O Harold Sherman Peabody RCAF presumed killed after surrender 31 July 1944.

F/O G.J. Wishart RAF confined in hospital due to injuries.

F/O James Harrington Doe - RCAF presumed killed after surrender 31 July 1944.

F/O R.L. Fiddick RCAF OK & evaded.

Wop/AG: Sgt Arthur Payton 30 RAFVR killed.

AG: Flt/Sgt Richard Godfrey Proulx 21 RCAF killed.

AG: Sgt Percy William Buckley 18 RAFVR killed.

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## Valleiry - 75 years later

*Alain Dardelin*

Operation Dragoon launched on 15 August 1944 in the coastal areas of Provence was a success. With the ensuing advance of Allied troops in the Rhône valley, the local Resistance groups took the opportunity to harass the occupying forces even more thus leading to the liberation of cities and towns.

On 16 August, the commune of Valleiry liberated itself from the German troops but at a price: there were deaths, casualties and burnt-down dwellings. Ultimately, Colonel Meyer, commanding the occupying forces, signed the article of surrender on 19 August 1944 at 2.00 p.m. at the *Hôtel Splendid*, the *Kommandantur*'s headquarters in Annecy.

Seventy five years later, eighteen standard bearers representing veterans' associations and myself carrying the Union Flag stood at attention on the arrival of the mayor Mr. Frédéric Mugnier accompanied by Mr. Jean-Marc Bassaget, *sous-préfet* of Saint Julien-en-Genevois, local parliamentarians and mayors, Mr. Gérard Blandin for *Souvenir Français*, General (2S) Pierre Martre, President of the Free French Foundation for Haute-Savoie, and representatives from Swiss and Italian associations. In his welcoming speech, Mr. Mugnier recounted the events which would lead to the liberation of Valleiry, and declared that a plaque in memory of the Free French of Haute-Savoie would be unveiled during the course of the ceremony.

In turn, General Martre said "Today we want to honour the Free French men and women who answered General de Gaulle's appeal because the direct witnesses of this page in the history of our country have almost all disappeared. Between June 1940 and July 1943, *la France Libre* was to become *la France Combattante*. During this period, 98 Haut-Savoyards fought in the ranks of the 1<sup>st</sup> Free French Division and the Leclerc Column from Cameroon to Tunisia then within the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armoured Division, and 38 in territorial France".

After giving a brief but rich account of the wartime course of the two young men, General Martre invited Messrs. Enzo Bonopera and Jean Michel, the last Free French of Haute-Savoie,



European Area Conference  
25—27 October 2019





to unveil the plaque donated by the town of Valleiry and *Souvenir Français*.

The ceremony continued with the school children singing *Le Chant des Partisans* and *La Marseillaise* joined by the audience. Three wreaths were laid at the memorial by the Free French, the *Souvenir Français* and the *sous-préfet* followed by one minute's silence.

The official part of the ceremony finished, the assembly sang *Les Allobroges* before proceeding to the nearby hall for the much-appreciated *vin d'honneur*.

## The Mali 13

Régis Pizot



A short ceremony was held at the Remembrance Wall near the French Consulate in Geneva for the 13 soldiers who died recently in Mali.

There were between 40 and 50 people and only one Standard Bearer present.



The Consul made a speech and afterwards, the names of the 13 dead soldiers were called out. At the same time a white rose was put on the monument for each soldier.

After that the *Marseillaise* was sung; the Consul thanked the people present and closed the ceremony which had lasted about 20 mn.

I went to see the Consul at the end of the ceremony as I was on my own and I told him I was representing RAFA.

He thanked me and told me that he had received a tweet from RAFA.





**At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them. Lest we forget.**





Never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few.



## The real fascination comes from flying like the old days

*Interview by Rolf Müller with Ueli Leutert published in AeroRevue no 9/2019; translated from the French by John Hannon*

Uniform and flight suit have accompanied Ueli Leutert from the very beginning of his career in flying in 1969. This pilot grew up in Wil, St Galle and now lives in Kusnacht, Zurich. As a child he was fascinated by flying, but also by trains, so he chose flying as a profession and model trains as a hobby. He wanted to experience every aspect of flying; the air force with its rapid formation missions and the civil side of things with Swissair (later Swiss) where he rose to senior captain and instructor. On retirement he continues to fly a Hunter two-seater, the “Papyrus” Hunter and often travels by Bücker. The Hunter is his favourite, a proper ‘war horse’, tough and easy to fly at the same time. Ueli Lautert’s interest also targets other historical aircraft such as the De Havilland DH 82 Tiger Moth.



*AeroRevue: Mr Leutert, how did you manage to fly a whole squadron of Tiger Moths to Switzerland?*

Ueli Leutert: At the beginning of March 1991, I was chosen, along with Ruedi Pauli, to fly for the Red Cross at the end of the first Gulf War taking two MD-80s on a prisoner exchange. With these two MD-80s we transported 148 Iraqis from Hafr al Batin to Baghdad. I then flew from there to Riyadh Military Airport with 35 pilots, including some from the RAF and some paratroopers, where we were met by Norman Schwarzkopf and Tony Blair. During the flight we were escorted by two British Tornados and two US F-15s. From that time on I can count many friends among the RAF. One of them is Rupert Clark and he flies a Tiger Moth.



*And that was the start of a long friendship?*

Absolutely; as a pilot in No 15 Squadron I had done some homework on pilots from the same number squadron in the RAF. Rupert Clark turned up out of the blue. He sat with us on the flight deck during the whole flight. We have kept in very close touch ever since. This very close friendship has lasted for 25 years. Our families meet regularly, be it in England or here in Switzerland.

*You visited the rescued fighter pilots in England. Were you invited to visit RAF stations?*

As early as October 1991 most of us from No 15 Squadron had visited our opposite numbers from No 15 Squadron RAF in Laarbruch in Germany. On that occasion I had the privilege of flying with Rupert Clark in a Tornado GR4. Later, I visited him regularly in England and he got permission for me to fly with him in a Tornado F3 and on several occasions in Hawks. The crowning glory for me was a flight as guest of the Red Arrows.

*What was your impression of what was then the RAF’s most modern jet?*

I was very impressed. In our Hunters we flew using map, compass and watch. At the time, the Tornado GR4 was fitted with an IRS inertial reference system. The Tornado is a two-seater. The occupant in the rear seat is responsible for navigation and weapons management.



*The old RAF fighter pilots flying the Tiger Moth today, do they derive very great pleasure in flying an aircraft devoid of electronic instruments, just like in the old days?*

The real fascination for us professional pilots is indeed to fly just like in the old days. Without electronic aids, by the seat of our pants, as it were. In the Tiger Moth or the Bücker all we need are instruments to monitor the engine. Some Tiger Moths don't even have a radio or a transponder. In England pilots fly from very small aerodromes. They flew to St Stephan in formation with biplanes fitted with navigation aids.

*Had you already flown a Tiger Moth?*

Yes, of course, also with Rupert Clark in England. In return, he's flown with me in a Bücker.

*What are the main technical differences between the Tiger Moth and the Bücker?*

Although the Tiger Moth is not that much older than the Bücker there are quite noticeable differences. The Bücker is much more agile and manoeuvrable. Furthermore, the original version of the Tiger Moth had neither brakes nor a tail wheel, just a tail skid. This makes operating out of St Stephan, with its tarmac runway, difficult. We need many assistants to move the aircraft on the ground.

*How did the preparations for the overflight go?*

There are normally nine Tiger Moths at air shows in England. They are flown by very experienced professional pilots who are either still active or retired. However, you can't compare the terrain in England with Simmental. So, Jeff Millom, the formation leader, took a commercial flight from London to Zurich and I then flew him to St Stephan in a Bücker. He was able to get a good idea of the surrounding countryside both from the ground and in the air. The formation display lasts nine minutes in England. We were over St Stephan for about 40 minutes enabling him to test all the possible variations of the display in Switzerland.

## A Michigan Christmas Story

One day in early September the chief of a Native American tribe was asked by his tribal elders if the winter of 2011/12 was going to be cold or mild. The chief asked his medicine man, but he too had lost touch with reading the signs from the natural world around the Great Lakes.

In truth, neither of them had any idea about how to predict the coming winter. However, the chief decided to take a modern approach, and the chief rang the National Weather Service in Gaylord, Michigan.

'Yes, it is going to be a cold winter,' the meteorological officer told the chief. Consequently, he went back to his tribe and told the men to collect plenty of firewood.

A fortnight later the chief called the Weather Service and asked for an update. 'Are you still forecasting a cold winter?' he asked.

'Yes, very cold', the weather officer told him.

As a result of this brief conversation the chief went back to the tribe and told his people to collect every bit of wood they could find.

A month later the chief called the National Weather Service once more and asked about the coming winter. 'Yes,' he was told, 'it is going to be one of the coldest winters ever.'

'How can you be so sure?' the chief asked.

The weatherman replied: 'Because the Native Americans of the Great Lakes are collecting wood like crazy.'



		Royal Air Forces Association Swiss Branch List of events 2020	
7 March		Branch AGM, Crowne Plaza Hotel	
6 June		RAFA Summer Lunch, Hôtel du Port, Yvoire, France	
18 June	TBC	Anniversary of Gen. de Gaulle's Address in 1944, Plateau de Glières, France	
25—28 June		European Area/Annual Conference, Grand Hotel, Blackpool	
13 September		Battle of Britain 80th Commemoration Ceremony and Lunch, Vevey, Switzerland	
20 October	TBC	No 78 Sqn Halifax Commemoration, Montcony, France	

TBC = To Be Confirmed