

The Halifax in Cléguer (56 - Brittany)

by René-Luc Aubry

At the end of February of this year 2021, Mrs Chantal Guignen, living in Cleguer in Morbihan, north of Lorient, contacted our association ABSA 39-45.

On the night of January 29, 1943, a Handley Page Halifax was shot down near the village of his childhood, in Cosquerquelen in the town of Cleguer. Chantal Guignen wanted to know whether we had more information on the airmen who died that day. She also said that one of her brothers, Bernard Scouarnec, knew precisely the location of the crash.

The case is known by ABSA 39-45 ; all the airmen aboard the Halifax HR662 (code EQ-H) died in the crash. They are buried in the Guidel cemetery.

The crew consisted of :

- Pilot Officer (Pilot). Theunis Christoffel ROUX, 29 years old.
- Pilot Officer (Air Gunner). Rowland George BRINKWORTH, 28 years old
- Sergeant (Air Gnr.). James Dick ADAM, 26 years old.
- Sergeant (W.Op./Air Gnr.). William Kenneth BARTON.
- Sergeant (Flt. Engr.). **Francis Anthony CAVADINO**, 19 years old.
- Flying Officer (Navigator). Edwin Joseph PAYLING, 33 years old.
- Sergeant (Navigator/Bomber). ROSTRON, 30 years old.



Francis A. CAVADINO
Photo © Martin Carrack - Findagrave.com

The Pilot Officer ROUX (a Rhodésian from Fort Victoria) had 23 missions under his belt, Sergeant CAVADINO only 1 mission and all other 2 missions.



They belonged to 408th Squadron "Goose" of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), based in Great Britain and under operational command of the RAF.

« L'insigne du 408 SQN de la RCAF représenté par une bernache du Canada (oie noire d'où l'appellation « Goose », avec pour devis « Pour la liberté »)

This squadron operated as part of the main force of Bomber Command from June 24, 1941 until the end of the war. It began its operations equipped with the Handley Page Hampden, before changing to the Handley Page Halifax powered by Merlin engines in September 1942. After a little more than one year, these were replaced by Lancaster IIs in October 1943, then by Halifax III and VII powered by Hercules engines. At the end of the war in Europe, the squadron converted to the Canadian-built Lancaster B Mk.X

and in June 1945 returned its planes to Canada in preparation for the planned invasion of Japan. The unit was eventually disbanded due to the Japanese surrender.



No 408 SQN RCAF in October 1942
Photo © with courtesy of Bombercommandmuseum.ca

The night of January 29, 1943

On the night of January 29-30, 1943, Halifaxes of No. 408 and 419 Squadrons were joined by 40 Vickers Wellington of No. 420, 424, 425, 426, and 427 Squadrons to lead an attack on the harbor infrastructure in Lorient. Explosive bombs as well as incendiary bombs from an altitude between 11,000 and 19,000 feet are planned to be dropped on the target. The "Flak" is important and according to reports the weather is really bad.



Handley Page Halifax of no 408 SQN RCAF
Photo © with courtesy of Bombercommandmuseum.ca

Many aircrafts have mechanical problems, especially due to heavy icing. The Halifax HR662, coded "EQ-H" did not return from this mission ; it was the first Halifax of 408 Squadron lost in an operation.

29/30	I	43	R.A.F./B.C.	B			
				10°	Halifax II	1	Lorient. Le temps est très nuageux. La Flak est très importante. Quatorze des Halifax attaquent; quatre reviennent avec leurs munitions; un appareil du 158 ^e s'écrase à Plougasnou vers 18 heures le 29. Les appareils qui parviennent sur zone larguent 15,6 tons de bombes, 13 770 bombes incendiaires de 4 lb et 510 de 4 lb de type X. Résultats non observés.
			GIV	76°	Halifax II	5	
				78°	Halifax II	8	
				158°	Halifax II	5	
				166°	Wellington	12	Dix-sept des 28 Wellington attaquent (HSO = 20 h 10 à 20 h 52) à l'aide de leurs appareils de navigation tant la zone est couverte.
			G1	199°	Wellington	2	
				301°	Wellington	2	
				305°	Wellington	2	
				408°	Halifax II	22	Treize de ces appareils attaquent et larguent 17 tons de bombes, 11 670 de 4 lb incendiaires et 240 de 4 lb de type X. [Un Halifax du 408 ^e est abattu sur zone] un du 419 ^e se écrase au retour.
				419°	Halifax II	1	
				420°	Wellington	47	Trente et un de ces appareils attaquent et larguent 13,6 tons de bombes, 18 930 bombes incendiaires de 4 lb et 510 de 4 lb de type X. Un Wellington du 424 ^e et un second du 420 ^e se écrasent en Grande Bretagne au retour. Un Wellington du 420 ^e est porté manquant.
				424°	Wellington	1	
				1	
						Total =	
						116	
						+	
						14	
							Au total 50,7 tons de bombes sont largués.
							Nota : six Halifax du 35 ^e escadron, 5 Lancaster du 83 ^e escadron et

Extract from Roland Bohn's book relating to missions of January 1943



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Visit to the crash site

Shortly after Ms. Guignen's message, a trip to the site was organized and, on July 2, 2021, we went to the scene of the crash, Benoît Paquet, Daniel Dahiot and myself. This was my first real experience. I admit I have felt a certain excitement, and at the same time a lot of emotion. Arrived on site, we were very warmly welcomed by Mrs. Chantal Guignen, her brother Mr. Bernard Le Scouarnec and Mrs. Christine Le Meur. Motivated by the interest shown in the history of these airmen, by the research carried out and by the duty of memory, their great consideration for ABSA 39-45



Chantal Guignen, René-Luc Aubry et Christine Le Meur sur le site DU CRASH Photo © Benoît Paquet

was evident. Quickly, we got down to the facts and rapidly, we were driven to the exact crash site. On the evening of January 29, 1943, the falling aircraft passed just over the farm buildings, luckily without hitting them, before crashing in the field just behind the building.



Daniel Dahiot, René - Luc Aubry and Bernard Le Scouarnec in front of the house which was flown over at roof level by the Halifax which then crashed into the field behind the house.

Photo © Benoît Paquet

The aircraft hit the ground quickly after flying over the houses and slid down to the edge of a small wood about 300 meters away. At the time, an engine, which had probably detached, had been found closer, 100 meters from the houses.



The place where the aircraft crashed on the edge of a small wood (red arrow) and where an engine fell (green arrow)

Photo © René-Luc Aubry

On the site of the crash, Daniel Dahiot, equipped with his detector, conducted a reconnaissance of the area. Although the device indicated in a few places the presence of small pieces of metal, the ground was too hard and stony for us to dig deeply. Nothing was therefore discovered that day ; no doubt the ground had been quickly cleared at the time of the crash.



Daniel Dahiot detects and René - Luc Aubry digs ; a real team-WORK ! Photo © Benoît Paquet

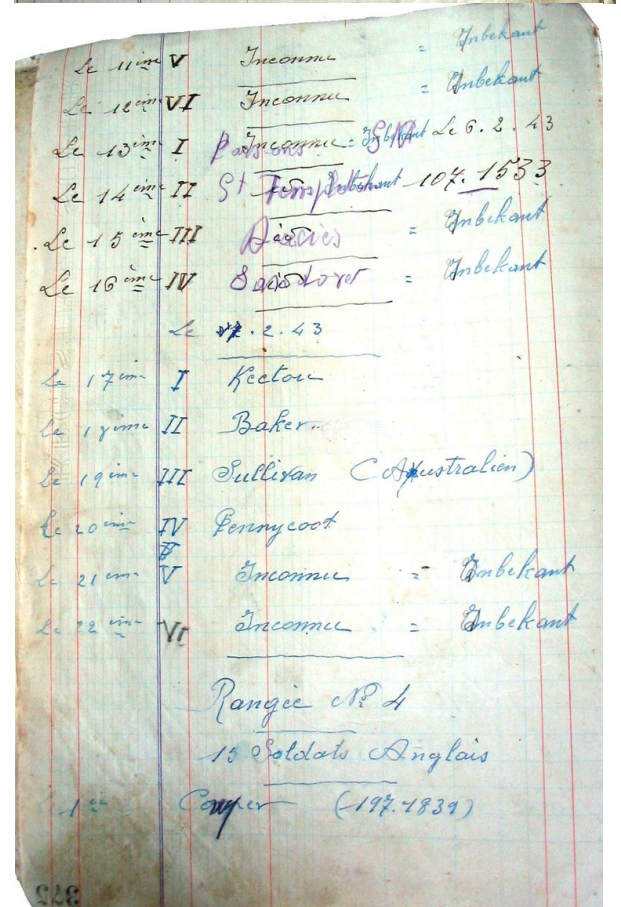
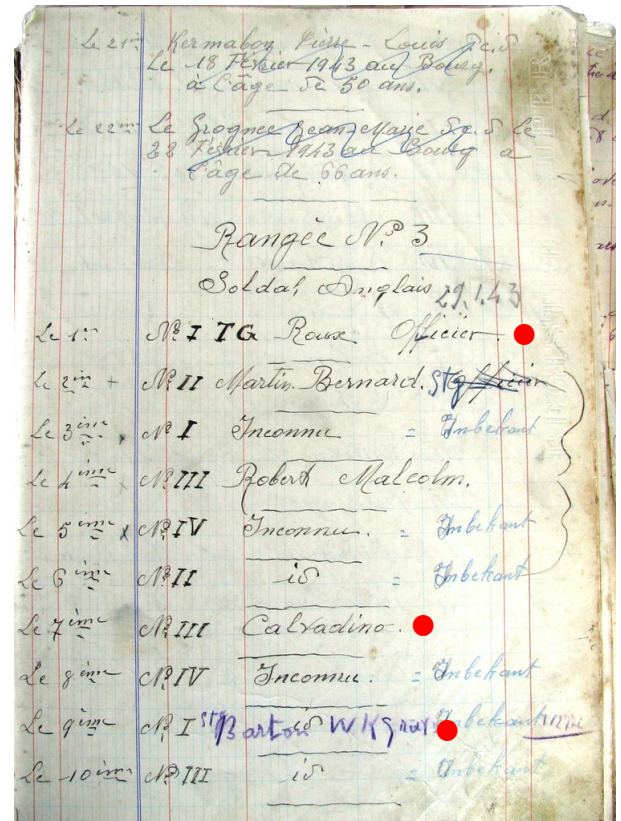
According to Mrs. Le Meur, an aerial photo taken later showed the imprint of the aircraft's crash in the field. The photo showed that the Halifax had probably skidded before coming to a complete stop, with its right wing then oriented towards the wood. It is in this wood that Bernard Le Scouarnec tells us he has disco-

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vered in 2002, undoubtedly coming from the bomber, and almost intact, a fire extinguisher. He gave it to the Resistance Museum in Saint-Marcel en Malestroit (56). Collided with a German fighter, shot down in flight, hit by anti-aircraft defense (Flak), the real circumstances of the disaster remain still very vague today. What we do know, however, is that the aircraft did not fall vertically. It was not completely destroyed in mid-flight and the pilot probably tried to the last moment to land the aircraft in distress. Did he manage to avoid the house ? How many of the crew were still alive before they were charred in the burning cabin ? It took no more time to motivate the ABSA 39-45 team into further research ; we will of course keep you informed of the results of our investigations.

On the way back, my thoughts went to these airmen, but also to the inhabitants because many perished during these raids. There was a great risk of living near sensitive sites. If the ABSA 39-45 investigation is to continue, however, this trip brought the first information about the crash. This has been made possible thanks to the undeniable interest in our research by Mrs. Chantal Guignen, her brother Mr. Bernard Le Scouarnec and Mrs. Le Meur, who welcomed us so kindly and that we will keep informed of each new information and progress on the subject. ■



Extract from a handwritten register of the Guidel cemetery established by the Germans. It contains the names of some of the crew of the Halifax that fell in Cléguer. ►