

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE CRASH OF LANCASTER LL836 ACHIET LE PETIT 11/12 April 1944**

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