

Dear Members of 550 Squadron and RAF North Killingholme Association

It is with a great pleasure that I send you this message in the name of the people of Rebecq.

On 7<sup>th</sup> May 2011, we had the honour of welcoming delegates of the 550 Squadron Association for the inauguration of the monument we had erected in memory of the crew of Lancaster JA712 BQ-H, flown by Pilot Officer Curtis Purney of the Royal Canadian Air Force which crashed in a field outside our village on May 28<sup>th</sup> 1944. In this dramatic accident, five of your airmen were killed, one was seriously injured and a second, hidden by the Belgian Resistance.

Following the crash some of the villagers were arrested, questioned by the Gestapo and imprisoned in Brussels before being deported to Germany. Some of them were sent to concentration camps, others to a transit camp or sent on the last train leaving Brussels for the Buchenwald camp. Fortunately, this last train (named "the Ghost Train") never reached its destination as the Belgian railway employees sabotaged locomotives and track.

Three of our compatriots never returned to their homeland as they died in concentration camps. Their history is linked forever to that of the British and Canadian airmen who fell in Rebecq in the early hours of May 28<sup>th</sup> 1944.

The men and women who risked their lives for our freedom were never honoured. Sixty seven years later we decided to correct that mistake.

During a solemn ceremony attended by representatives of the United Kingdom and Canadian embassies and other Belgian and British delegations, civilian and military honours were given to the victims of this disastrous event.

The day of remembrance also made us understand that it is necessary to continue the "Duty of Memory" we began with the creation of the memorial.

Therefore, an association will be constituted with the objective of remembering the British and Belgian heroes who died. The Association will maintain the Memorial but also raise the awareness of younger generations about their history. We will go into schools and explain what happened and say to them that it should not happen again.

I have the pleasure of announcing to you that we have already decided that 550 Squadron and the Royal British Legion will be honorary members of this Association and that on the important dates in November and May each year we shall lay a wreath of flowers for you.

At this point I would like to invite you to Rebecq in May 2014 when we shall organize a special ceremony to not only commemorate the 70th anniversary of the crash but also to celebrate the liberation of Rebecq by British troops on September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1944.

It is with great anticipation that I wait for July 2012. I shall attend the 550 Squadron Association reunion celebration organized in North Killingholme accompanied by some of my fellow committee members.

We shall bring you the parts of the Lancaster BQ-H which we have conserved and which we have decided to return to you.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the name of my friends and compatriots, I send you my brotherly salute!

Wilfred Burie

Rebecq, June 11<sup>th</sup> 2011.