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INFO



## Edito

Dear friends,

The first half of 2024 was full of activity (see newsletter #26), but the second half was even busier. Discover in these few pages the tributes paid to numerous English, Canadian, American, and, of course, French aviators and civilians. Also discover the brand new book in the ABSA 39-45 collection, the result of many years of research by Guy Castel and Pierre Mahé.

I wish you a good read.

Benoît Paquet



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# July 6-7, 2024 : tribute to the crew of B-17 42-5053

By Benoît Paquet with the precious help of Didier Giraudeau (photos by the author unless otherwise stated)

## July 4, 1943, the Boeing B-17F "KY-L" (s/n 42-5053) crashed in Saint-Colomban (44).

Château-Bougon airfield was often a target for the Allied forces before the 1944 landings. This Sunday, July 4, 1943, the 8<sup>th</sup> US Air Force sent 61 B-17s from 92<sup>nd</sup>, 305<sup>th</sup> and 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Groups to bomb it, including B-17 s/n 42-5053 (code KY-L) of the 366<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron (305<sup>th</sup> BG) nicknamed "Bloody Tangier Show".



The B-17 « Bloody Tangier Show » taxiing before takeoff.  
Photo USAF

After bombing the airfield, the aircraft was hit by very intense anti-aircraft fire and was then pursued by German fighters. Two crew members were killed in the aircraft, but the other eight managed to bale out, one of whom was seriously injured and was pushed out by his comrades. The B-17 crashed at a place called "Besson" in Saint-Colomban (44) while the eight



The tail of B-17 « Bloody Tangier Show » after the crash became a local curiosity.

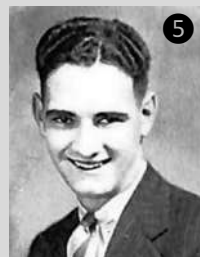
Photo site [B-17-saint-colomban.ovh](https://www.b-17-saint-colomban.ovh) with courtesy of Didier Giraudeau

survivors landed in the Saint-Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu sector (44). Six of them were quickly captured by the Germans, but the other two were hidden by the French in nearby farms.

With the help of resistance networks, these two airmen were hidden at the pharmacist's in Basse-Indre (44) and then taken to Spain, then Gibraltar, before flying to Marrakech and then to England on September 8, 1943, just over two months after being shot down.

### The crew :

- ① 1<sup>st</sup> Lt William C. Wetzel (pilot), escaped
- ② P/O. Charles T. Cockrell (co-pilot), P.O.W.
- ③ 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Charles E. Jr Allen (bombardier), P.O.W.
- ④ 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Ralph Mc Kee (navigator), escaped
- ⑤ T/Sgt Earl L. Sell (radio operator), K.I.A.
- ⑥ S/Sgt Doya C. Garrett (air gunner), P.O.W.
- ⑦ S/Sgt William O. Hulett (air gunner), P.O.W.
- ⑧ S/Sgt Peter Hnatuick (engineer/gunner), P.O.W.
- ⑨ S/Sgt William F. Mooney (air gunner), P.O.W.
- ⑩ S/Sgt Bernard C. McKnight (air gunner), K.I.A.



Photos ① ③ ④ ⑤ ⑦ Bruno Rat (ABSA 39-45)

Photo ② Judy Ann

Photo ③ website [Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency](https://www.defensepowmiaaccountingagency.com)

Photos ⑧ ⑨ ⑩ : American Air Museum [FRE 1289](https://www.fre1289.com)



# July 6-7, 2024 : tribute to the crew of B-17 42-5053

By Benoît Paquet with the precious help of Didier Giraudeau (photos by the author unless otherwise stated)

## Saturday 6 and Sunday July 7, July 2024, tribute to the crew of the Boeing B-17F « Bloody Tangier Show ».

In July 2024, the Town Hall of Saint-Colomban (44), with the U.N.C. « Saint - Colomban mémoire » (veterans association) and the new « B17 Team 2024 », commemorated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the crash of the B-17F « Bloody Tangier Show » in 1943. This event mobilized many local veterans and 9 American descendants of the families of Ralph McKee and William Hulett.

This very rich program was punctuated by historical visits, military reenactments, conferences and moments of conviviality.

Highlights included presentations of the history of the B17 and the stories of Ralph McKee and William Hulett, but also visits to key sites linked to the airmen's escape, and activities involving local people and including schoolchildren. Speeches, intergenerational meetings, and cultural exchanges were at the heart of the celebrations.



On July 4, 2024, students from Saint-Louis and Jacques Prévert schools went on a hike in the footsteps of airman Ralph McKee's escape.

Photo website [B-17-saint-colomban.ovh](http://B-17-saint-colomban.ovh) with courtesy of Didier Giraudeau

This weekend of remembrance was a poignant tribute to the memory of the airmen, and a testimony of gratitude to those who helped them.



An American military camp was set up for the occasion in the heart of the town of Saint-Colomban.

Despite the logistical challenges, this event was a real success which undoubtedly strengthened the ties between Saint-Colomban and its American guests.



10 children from the town paid tribute to the 10 crew members of the « Bloody Tangier Show ».

Photo website [B-17-saint-colomban.ovh](http://B-17-saint-colomban.ovh) with courtesy of Didier Giraudeau



Descendants of Ralph McKee and William Hulett around the memorial erected in 2004 in memory of the B-17 « Bloody Tangier Show » crew. Photo website [B-17-saint-colomban.ovh](http://B-17-saint-colomban.ovh) with courtesy of Didier Giraudeau



# July 6-7, 2024 : tribute to the crew of B-17 42-5053

By Benoît Paquet with the precious help of Didier Giraudeau (photos by the author unless otherwise stated)

Having met Corinne Pouvreau and Didier Giraudeau on May 8, 2024 during the tribute to the crew of the Hampden which fell at Pont-Saint-Martin (44) [see [newsletter issue #26](#)], we were invited to participate in this commemorative weekend by exhibiting various aircraft parts and other information panels.



Under the covered playground of Saint-Louis school in Saint-Colomban, the stands of Bruno Rat (on the left) and ABSA 39-45 (in the center and on the right) await visitors, in front of a hopskotch course !

**Bruno Rat**, also a member of our ABSA 39-45 association, also exhibited to present his book relating in detail the combat and the fall of the B-17 « Bloody Tangier Show ».



Note that day the visit to our stand of Daniel Chateau (ABSA 39-45 / Aéroscope Atlantique), Lionel Le Scornec (ABSA 39-45) and Jean-François Le Clerc (president of Aéroscope Atlantique) !

As usual, we met some great people during this event :

- Annick Guilbaud contacted us in May 2024 looking for information on two airmen who had been hosted by her grandparents and father in Sainte-Pazanne (44). With the invaluable help of Daniel Dahiot, we were able to find the descendants of these airmen. We met Annick on July 6, 2024 in Saint-Colomban.

We will communicate about this research in a future issue of our newsletter.

- Jean-François Vinet had a grandfather who hosted an Allied airman who left him a brush on which he had engraved a code (35-A 3408). He asked us to identify it. Despite various researches, the code has not been deciphered yet.



A brush left by an airman to Jean-François Vinet's grandfather. The unknown airman had engraved « 35-A 3408 ». We are still trying to identify this code.

We will not end this article without congratulating the « B17 Team 2024 » and especially Didier Giraudeau for the success of their event and we thank them for giving us the opportunity to exhibit on this occasion.

If you want to know more about the history of this B-17 bomber and the « B17 team 2024 », we invite you to visit the website « [b17-saint-colomban](#) ».

# Val d'Izé (35), August 3, 2024 : tribute to an RAF crew

by **Benoît Paquet** (photos by the author unless otherwise stated)

**August 8, 1944, the Armstrong Whitworth Albemarle Mk I P1501 of 296 Squadron** took off at 10:05 p.m. from RAF Brize-Norton in England. Its mission was to drop six containers of weapons and equipment to resistance fighters in Indre-et-Loire, 30 km south of Tours. The crew consisted of six men.

The circumstances of the aircraft's disappearance remain unclear, but around midnight, gunshots were heard in the sky above Val-d'Izé (35). The aircraft was seen on fire heading towards the Hurie farm, inhabited by **Mr et Mrs Bottier**. He flew close to a tree, setting it ablaze, and crashed 60 m further into a meadow. The gendarmerie report at that time mentions the remains of 2 or 3 bodies found in the wreckage of the plane, which exploded upon hitting the ground. The body of the radio operator was found about a hundred meters away, without a parachute. He is said to have evacuated the aircraft while on flight. He is buried in Bayeux cemetery. There is no trace of burial for the other 5 bodies.



An Albemarle Mk I in flight over England.  
Photo [IWM \(CH 12048\)](#) - UK Government - public domain

On **June 11, 2013**, ABSA 39-45 operated excavations at the aircraft crashsite. Many parts were found, including an engine, the four machine guns in the dorsal turret, and a propeller blade.



Artwork © Jean-Marie Guillou

After cross-checking the claims for that night, the most likely cause of the aircraft's loss was that it was shot down by a friendly aircraft, a British twin-engine Mosquito from No 604 Squadron on night patrol in the Saint-Malo area. The latter claimed a German Dornier Do 217, with a silhouette similar to that of the Albemarle. A sad twist of fate for the crew.

The crew consisted of :  
W/O **Bruce STENNING** (pilot)  
F/S **Edwin Raymond ABELL** (navigator)  
F/S **Alan Francis Charles ELWOOD**  
F/S **Charles Alfred HAMMOND**  
F/S **Frederick Norman MANTON**  
Sgt **Ralph COWHAM** (radio operator/gunner)



The ABSA 39-45 team, with broad smiles, alongside the mine clearance team during the June 2013 search in Val d'Izé. Photo ABSA 39-45



# Val d'Izé (35), August 3, 2024 : tribute to an RAF crew

by **Benoît Paquet** (photos by the author unless otherwise stated)

**August 3, 2024**, at the initiative of the town hall of Val d'Izé, the U.N.C. (Veterans association) and the Souvenir Français, a commemoration was organized in collaboration with ABSA 39-45 to honor the sacrifice of 6 airmen at the crash site of their aircraft.



Bruno Delva, the mayor of Val d'Izé, welcomes visitors and pays tribute to the crew, not far from the commemorative plaque.

After being welcomed by Mr Bruno Delva, mayor of Val d'Izé, various speeches, in French or in English, followed one another :

- **Daniel Dahiot** and myself on behalf of ABSA 39-45.
  - **David Forsyth**, representing the Royal Air Force Association.
  - **Martin Barmby**, representing the Old Bridlington Club.
- Indeed, one of the members of this unfortunate crew, F/Sgt Edwin Raymond ABELL, was a student at Bridlington School in Yorkshire.



Daniel Dahiot recalls the tragic story of the Albemarle P1501 on August 8, 1944.



Benoît Paquet tells the story of the crash of the Albemarle P1501



David Forsyth, of the RAF Association recalls the tragic story of Albemarle P1501 (above) and then places a Royal Air Force roundel and salutes in memory of the crew who fell on August 8, 1944 (below).





# Val d'Izé (35), August 3, 2024 : tribute to an RAF crew

by **Benoît Paquet** (photos by the author unless otherwise stated)



Lucienne and Marcel Bottier, witnesses of the tragedy in August 1944, when they were children.

**Marcel Bottier** and his sister **Lucienne**, who were 4 and 7 years old respectively in August 1944, were also present. They witnessed the crash in 1944 : the plane flew close to their family farm and crashed some 60 meters away in a field.



Martin Barmby at the spot where the Albemarle went down in 1944, shows the Old Bridlingtonians flag in tribute to F/Sgt Abell, a student from Bridlington School and member of the crew.

A plaque was placed for the occasion at the very spot where the aircraft fell.



The Old Bridlingtonians delegation near the plaque at the site of the aircraft's crash.

Wreaths of flowers were also placed at the foot of the stele which borders the road.



The commemorative plaque, decorated with flowers and the RAF roundel, contributed by David Forsyth. A plaque, donated by Old Bridlingtonians in memory of F/Sgt Abell (right), will soon be added to the commemorative plaque.



At the end of the tribute ceremony, a cocktail was organised in a municipal hall, then a lunch in the presence of English visitors, the family of Mr Bottier and Mrs Huchet (from the town hall, in charge of relations with associations and culture in Val d'Izé) and our association ABSA 39-45. ■



# August 4, 2024, Châteaubriant celebrates its liberation !

by **Benoît Paquet** (photos by the author unless otherwise stated)



Châteaubriant's covered market is preparing to welcome visitors to celebrate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the city's liberation. At the entrance to the building, a Jeep from the Châteaubriant association "Atlantique Mémoire" is displayed.

Celebrating the liberation of Châteaubriant every August is always a pleasure. But this year, 2024, 80 years later, the event had a very special tone. First, an exhibition at the covered market, where our association was able to display various models and aircraft parts.



Installing the parachute at the covered market is not so easy ! Pierre Mahé (back to camera) leads the maneuver.

Just like a few years ago, our friend Pierre Mahé, a longtime member, was kind enough to display his dummy dressed as an American pilot under a deployed parachute at the entrance of the covered market ; needless to say that it was an amazing sight for visitors the effect on visitors was guaranteed !



The mannequin, dressed in an American airman's uniform from the Pierre Mahé collection, surrounded by kakemonos depicting the other pilots in the collection, welcomes visitors at the entrance of the exhibition.



The ABSA 39-45 stand continues to attract visitors who can discover parts of the English Armstrong Whitworth Albemarle aircraft which crashed in Val d'Izé (35) on August 8, 1944 while it was supposed to parachute weapons to the maquis in the Tours region (see article page 6).

Then, an American military camp was set up in Radevormwald Park. The residents of Châteaubriant were able to admire numerous vintage military vehicles, including the famous American Sherman tank, as well as numerous Jeeps and other half-tracks.



# August 4, 2024, Châteaubriant celebrates its liberation !

by Benoît Paquet (photos by the author unless otherwise stated)



The Sherman in the colors of the "Montereau II" (2<sup>nd</sup> Tank Company, 501 RCC from General Leclerc's 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division) at Radevormwald Park, undoubtedly the centerpiece of the American military camp set up to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the town of Châteaubriant.

But what probably most marked this year's commemoration were the many highlights organized by the Châteaubriant Town Hall in the presence of Jeremiah Wilkinson, great-grandson of the American soldier Leo Clark, one of the 6 Americans killed on August 4, 1944 during the liberation of the city.



Jeremiah Wilkinson pays tribute to his great-grandfather Leo Clark (◀ photo) under the watchful eye of young people from [Opération Mirror 2024](#), Catherine Ciron, Alain Hunault and the American Colonel Pongpat Deck Piluek.



Surrounded by young people from Operation Mirror 2024 and young people from the Châteaubriant C.M.J. (youth municipal council), Jeremiah Wilkinson places a tricolor ribbon around the marker on the « Voie de la Liberté ».



Daniel Jolys (left), from the « Cercle d'Histoire du Pays Martignolais », came to present his book on the Oscar Buckmaster Resistance Network. Next to him, Daniel Dahiot, Dominique Renaud, Benoît Paquet, from ABSA 39-45 and Pascal Manem, former member of ABSA 39-45, at the exhibition at the covered market in Châteaubriant.

The ABSA 39-45 would like to thank the town of Châteaubriant, Mayor Alain Hunault and Catherine Ciron, 1<sup>st</sup> deputy but also president of the « [Comité de la Voie de la Liberté](#) », whose commitment to the duty of remembrance is as strong as ever, for having allowed us to exhibit for two months at the covered market and for having experienced this weekend of commemoration. ■



# 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Dol-de-Bretagne (35)

by **Benoît Paquet** (photos Thierry Trotin, ABSA 39-45, unless otherwise stated - artworks Jean-Marie Guillou)

Located at the gateway to Brittany, Dol-de-Bretagne is a former episcopal city brimming with architectural treasures. This charming little town was liberated on August 4, 1944.

At the initiative of Patrick Amiot, president of ARCAD (Association for Research at Dol-de-Bretagne Cathedral), an exhibition was co-organized by the François Duine association, the ARCAD, the Souvenir Français and the Town Hall, from August 1 to 10 and September 5 to 22, 2024, at the « Espace Nominoë », in the courtyard of the bishopric.



For the ABSA 39-45, which already participated in the 2014 and 2019 issues of this exhibition relating the liberation of Dol-de-Bretagne, it was a pleasure to exhibit for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time and to display some aircraft parts and various models at the invitation of Patrick Amiot.



Two views of the exhibition, showing many WWII objects presented by various collectors. See above, on the left against the wall, the objects presented by the ABSA 39-45.



Aircraft parts presented by the ABSA 39-45. From left to right, engine pistons, oxygen cylinders, and a landing gear component.



# 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Dol-de-Bretagne (35)

by **Benoît Paquet** (photos Thierry Trotin, ABSA 39-45, unless otherwise stated - artworks Jean-Marie Guillou)

We exhibited parts from three different aircrafts :

- oxygen bottles from a Lancaster that fell on June 9, 1944 in Betton (35).  
All seven crew members were killed.
- 2 pistons from the engines of the Armstrong Whitworth Albemarle fallen on August 8, 1944 at Val d'Izé (35) (see article page 6).
- A part of the landing gear of a P-51B Mustang that fell on June 8, 1944 in Princé (35). The pilot was killed.



Two 1:32 scale models were also presented in their display cases :

- Lieutenant Glennon Moran's Mustang P-51C, from 478<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron (**photo below ▼**).



- his victim, the Messerschmitt Bf 109 G of Leutnant Harti Schmiedel, from 4./JG 53, killed on June 12, 1944 at « Le Rheu » (35) (**photo below ▼**).



Finally, our map of Ille-et-Vilaine, listing all aircrafts crashes sites (all nationalities combined) during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, was displayed on a wall at the exhibition.

We would like to thank Patrick Amiot for proposing us to exhibit in Dol-de-Bretagne and to honor the research and preparation work of the 12 volunteers who worked with him.



- **The Lancaster crew** from No 50 Squadron R.A.F. fallen on June 9, 1944 in Betton (35) :



- Pilot Officer **John GILMOUR** ((pilot).
- Sergeant **Frank William SAVAGE** (engineer).
- Flight Sergeant **Gilbert Harold WRIGHT** (navigator).
- Sergeant **Donald Henry BROWETT** (bombardier).
- Sergeant **Kenneth William WARNER** (radio operator - gunner).
- Sergeant **Thomas Edvard ALEXANDER** (air gunner).
- Flight Sergeant **Alexander MacLEOD** (gunner).



- **The Albemarle crew** from No 296 Squadron R.A.F. fallen on August 8, 1944 in the Val d'Izé (35) :



- Warrant Officer **Bruce STENNING** (pilot).
- Flight Sergeant **Edwin Raymond ABELL** (navigator).
- Flight Sergeant **Alan Francis Charles ELWOOD**.
- Flight Sergeant **Alfred Charles HAMMOND**.
- Flight Sergeant **Frederick Norman MANTON**.
- Sergeant **Ralph COWHAM** (radio operator - gunner).

- **The pilot of P-51 B** fallen on June 8, 1944 in Princé (35) was 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Joseph Francis SAWICKI Jr. (**photo ►**) from 505<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron (339<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group).





# August 14, 2024 : tribute to S/Ldr Cook and F/L. Pyrah

by Frank Bernard, Air Memorial (photos Air Memorial unless otherwise stated)



**August 14, 2024 - Ceremony at the Île-aux-Moines (56) in memory of Squadron Leader Alec Ernest Cook and Flight Lieutenant Stanley Harrison Pyrah – No 235 Squadron - Coastal Command - Royal Air Force.**

On August 14, 1944, a Mosquito fighter-bomber from No 235 Squadron of Coastal Command, a component of the Royal Air Force, crashed in the Gulf of Morbihan a few hundred meters from the Île-aux-Moines. The two airmen on board did not survive. They were **Squadron Leader Alec Ernest COOK** and **Flight Lieutenant Stanley Harrison PYRAH**. The two British airmen are buried in the cemetery on the Île-aux-Moines



Stanley Harrison PYRAH  
Photo Claude Helias - « Conservatoire Aéronautique de Cornouaille ».

Alec Ernest COOK  
Photo Charles Cook

Approaching the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the crash, **Air Memorial** proposed to the Town Hall a project for a commemoration during which a plaque with the name of the crew could be erected. Sensitive to this project, Mr. Philippe Le Bérigot, the Mayor of the island, as well as the members of the council, accepted the principle of a celebration.

## Historical research.

With the help of the « **Association Finistérienne du Conservatoire Aéronautique de Cornouailles** » and the support of **Andrew Bird**, English historian of No 235 Squadron, we wrote the history of this mission as well as the biographies of the airmen. With this information, two explanatory panels incorporating period photos were created for the public, in French and in English.

The translation was done by **Mrs Chloé Calligaris**, a British resident in the Île-aux-Moines. In parallel, research conducted by Andrew Bird led to the discovery of Alec Cook's family. As for the investigations relating to Stanley Pyrah's family, despite some hope, they did not materialize.

## The mission of August 14, 1944.

No. 235 Squadron was based at Portreath on the north coast of Cornwall, England. Its role was to combat U-boats but also German ships. During August 1944, its missions focused primarily on the Bay of Biscay and the Gironde Estuary.

Thus, on August 14, 1944, 25 Mosquitos from Nos 235 and 248 Squadrons took off from Portreath in the early evening. Their mission was to destroy German ships positioned south of the Verdon-sur-Mer jetty in the Gironde department. After several hours of flying, the bombers arrived on site and engaged combat as soon as the targets were identified.

During the combat, the **Mosquito coded HR 139** of the Squadron Leader Alec Cook and Flight Lieutenant Stanley Pyrah was hit by a salvo of shells. The Mosquito was severely damaged, and the two men decided to attempt a flight back to Cornwall. Unfortunately, the stranded aircraft crashed on the way back off the coast of the Île-aux-Moines, killing both airmen.



July 18, 1944 : the Mosquito FBVI HR118 (3-W) of No 235 Squadron departing Portreath – Crew: F.O. Noel Russell – F.O. Tom Armstrong.  
Photo courtesy of Andrew D. Bird via FO Tom Armstrong - DFC.



# August 14, 2024 : tribute to S/Ldr Cook and F/L. Pyrah

by Frank Bernard, Air Memorial (photos Air Memorial unless otherwise stated)



## The ceremony of August 14, 2024.

The celebration begins with the boarding of officials and guests, including the Cook family, aboard 4 Sinagots, small fishing boats characteristic of the port of Séné, located in the Gulf of Morbihan.



Jean-Yves Reynaud (left) and Frank Bernard aboard a speedboat during the wreath-laying ceremony at sea.

At 10:45 a.m., detached by the French Air Force, a Hercules C-130 J transport plane in Luftwaffe colors and belonging to the Franco-German squadron based at the 105<sup>th</sup> air base in Evreux, flew over the flotilla twice at the very moment when a wreath of hydrangeas was placed at sea by the Cook family, the Mayor and the Sub-Prefect.



On board a Sinagot, a bouquet of hydrangeas picked on the « Île-aux-Moines » is dropped at sea by the Cook family in memory of Alec Ernest Cook and Stanley Harrison Pyrah.

Return to the coast at 11 a.m. where the ceremony begins with a speech by **Mr Philippe Le Bérigot**, which expresses the deep bond that has united the inhabitants of the island and British airmen for 80 years.

He adds :

**« By dying here, they entered our island community. We have decided not to forget their sacrifice ».**



Mister Le Bérigot, mayor of the « Île-aux-Moines », pays tribute to airmen Pyrah and Cook.

Then Frank Bernard, from the Air Memorial Association, spoke about the origins of the project and the progress of the mission of August 14, 1944. Chloé Calligaris, a British resident of the island, translated the same text into English. Then Mrs Elizabeth Désrè-Le Dugue, sister of Charles, the first islander to rescue the airmen, unveiled the memorial plaque sealed to the ground, bearing the names of Cook and Pyrah.

Stéphane Jarlégand, Sub-prefect, accompanied by a child from the island and a great-grandnephew of Alec Cook, then discovers **the symbolic work by Stéphane Dugied**, a local artist (photo ►).

A message from His Majesty Charles III, addressed especially for the ceremony, was read, in response to the request of the children of a school.

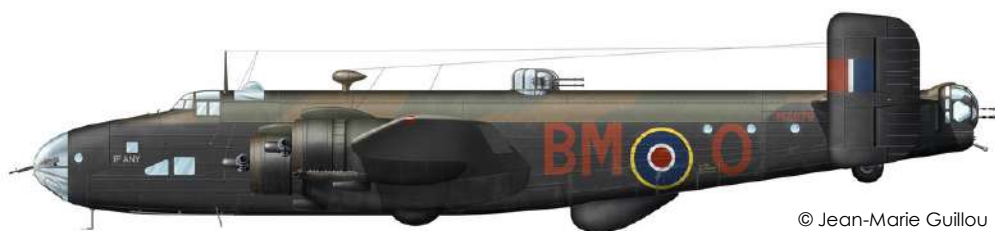


Then Charles Byam-Cook, eldest of Alec Cook's nephews, expresses in French, Alec Cook's career in the RAF but also his sincere thanks for the tribute paid. The procession departs to the cemetery, to the sound of bagpipes. The story of the crash written by an islander, Gaston Calbournin, several decades ago is read in English. Two wreaths of "Poppies" are placed on the graves by two officers, one of whom, attached to the British Embassy, represents the Royal Air Force. The British anthem closes the ceremony and the celebration. ■



# August 16-17, 2024 : tribute to the crew of the Halifax 'If any'

by **Benoît Paquet** (photos of the collective organizing the event, unless otherwise stated)



**On August 16 and 17, 2024, the first public tribute was paid in Saint-Malo to the crew of Halifax MZ879, a heavy bomber of the Royal Canadian Air Force that disappeared in the bay of Saint-Malo on August 31, 1944 during the bombing of the island of Cézembre, thus completing the liberation of Saint-Malo. These days will remain in our memories for a long time as an event rich in emotions.**

Paying tribute to a missing crew is always a poignant moment, especially when the families of the airmen are present. When the crew lost their lives at sea and their bodies have not been recovered, the emotion is even more intense; while land-based casualties are sometimes commemorated by local communities, this is rarely the case for airmen lost at sea, as seas and oceans often make such remembrance more challenging.



A commemorative plaque was placed on the wreck in 2018.  
Photo Olivier Brichet and Thierry Trotin

It all started in January 2024, thanks to the efforts of our passionate friends Thierry Trotin and Olivier Brichet, who uncovered the wreck of the Halifax Mk III MZ879, which was lost off the coast of Saint-Malo on 31st August 1944 (refer to newsletters #13 and #15).

They proposed the idea of honouring the crew of the aircraft and presented it to a collective comprising ABSA 39-45, the Association of French Combatant Forces and Deportees, Internees and Families of Ille-et-Vilaine, a member of the Association of Members and Friends of Heavy Groups, as well as the Association of Users of Rio – Rothéneuf – Saint-Coulomb.

The first step was to meet with the Saint-Malo Town Council to agree on a date, a location, and a programme. It was soon decided to organise the event to coincide with the celebrations marking the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the city's liberation, on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> August 2024. Our group then proposed a programme, which included the erection of a memorial plaque near the Fort d'Arboulé, close to the site where the aircraft had fallen, near the tip of La Varde. However, this idea did not comply with the regulations of the Conservatoire du Littoral, which suggested instead installing a memorial panel on the blockhouse at the entrance to the fort. This alternative was quickly accepted.

The second step involved locating and inviting the families of the airmen, with invaluable assistance from Shirley Stone in Canada. Most of the families were identified, and two of them decided to attend : Dawna Lee, accompanied by her son Mishen Pastitshi, members of the family of Canadian gunner James R. Hawkins, and the Frost family, comprising Graham, his two sons James and Nicholas, and his grandson Alex. We were deeply moved to learn that Carol Frost, Graham's wife and, above all, the daughter of flight engineer Charles W. Garrett — with whom we had also been in contact — had passed away two months prior to the event. The emotions were very strong during this August 2024 month.

The Halifax MZ879 was part of Canadian Squadron 433. Thierry Trotin therefore reached out to the squadron, which still exists, in order to inform them about our commemoration and to see if anyone might be able to take part. We were quite surprised when we



# August 16-17, 2024 : tribute to the crew of the Halifax 'If any'

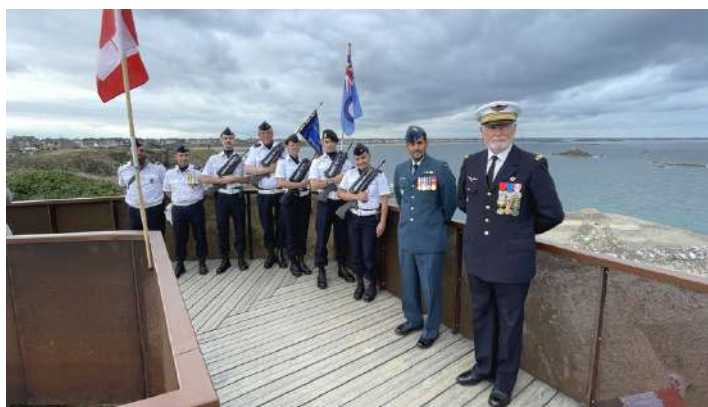
by **Benoît Paquet** (photos of the collective organizing the event, unless otherwise stated)

discovered that the Squadron Commanding Officer himself, Lieutenant Colonel Aaron Dhillon, would be crossing the Atlantic to join us in honouring the fallen airmen.



From left to right : Thierry Trotin, Olivier Brichet (hidden by Thierry), James and Alex Frost, Véronique Pelichet, Mishen Pastitshi, Dawna Lee, Lt-Colonel Aaron Dhillon, Nicholas and Graham Frost, Benoit Paquet, Gilles Lurton and Jean-Michel Martin.

We also reached out to the French Air Force and had the great pleasure and honour of welcoming a group from Air Detachment 928 of Brest-Lopérec on the day of the memorial plaque unveiling. This gesture of recognition was undoubtedly very much appreciated by the families and by Lieutenant Colonel Dhillon.



Air Detachment 928 of Brest-Lopérec alongside Lieutenant-Colonel Dhillon and our friend and ABSA 39-45 member, Honorary Commander Dany Bouché.

To ensure the success of our tribute, we decided to seek partners and supporters to provide the families of the airmen with the best possible hospitality. We were therefore very pleased to have Mr Guisnel among our benefactors, as he kindly offered his mansion where General Patton stayed in 1944, along with Mr Gaspard

Breton generously made a donation that contributed to funding, among other things, accommodation for various family members.

Everything was in place to create a memorable tribute ! The programme for these two days was as follows:

• **Friday, 16th August :**

- conference at the Rocabey Hall
- tribute at sea above the wreck of the Halifax
- a convivial evening hosted by Dominique Busnoug and Thierry Trotin

• **Saturday, 17th August :**

- commemoration of the crew's sacrifice and the unveiling of a plaque at Pointe de la Varde
- a cocktail lunch at Domaine des Mauriers

**A lecture on the history of the Halifax 'If Any', its crew, and the discovery of the wreck.**

After many years of research—both historical and practical, or rather “under the sea”—it was important for our collective to share the story and sacrifice of this crew with the wider public, especially in the presence of their families.



Thierry Trotin, Olivier Brichet and Benoit Paquet present the tragic story of the "If Any" bomber and its crew, as well as the discovery of the aircraft's wreckage, at the Rocabey Hall in Saint-Malo, in front of a large audience, including the families of the airmen and Lt-Colonel Dhillon of the RCAF.



# August 16-17, 2024 : tribute to the crew of the Halifax 'If any'

by **Benoît Paquet** (photos of the collective organizing the event, unless otherwise stated)

Thierry, Olivier, and I delivered our presentation in both French and English before an audience of around fifty people, recounting the tragic events of 31 August 1944. The second part of the talk focused on the lengthy yet rewarding search for the aircraft wreckage, which was discovered in 2018. We began the session with a minute's silence in memory of Captain Sébastien Mabire and Lieutenant Matthis Laurens of the French Air and Space Force, who tragically lost their lives during active service on 14 August 2024 while participating in a Rafale exercise.



The patrol boats of the Maritime Gendarmerie and the SNSM are quietly waiting for our group to pay our tribute at sea.

## The tribute at sea, quite a moving moment !

From the outset, our group had intended to take families out to sea aboard boats belonging to the Association des Usagers du Rio – Rothéneuf – Saint-Coulomb, of which our friend Michel Coué is a member. However, Thierry Trotin had the brilliant idea of discussing our project with the SNSM and the Maritime Gendarmerie of Saint-Malo. After a few conversations, we achieved a wonderful outcome.



SNSM sailors surround members of the families of airmen equipped with their Mae-Weat. On the far right, Véronique Pelichet, from the Association of French Combatant Forces, Deported, Internees and Families of Ille-et-Vilaine.

It was a privilege and an honour to take the families of our airmen out on the SNSM boat, accompanied by a vessel from the Maritime Gendarmerie. For the families, it was a meaningful gesture of our gratitude for the sacrifice made by their airmen parents. Directly above the wreck, 800 metres from the shoreline, flowers were gently laid into the sea as the Canadian and British anthems played. A crew from « France 3 Bretagne », who were with us on board, captured the moment for the evening news. On the way back, the SNSM and Gendarmerie vessels circled Cézembre Island to guide the families to the site of the 31 August 1944 mission.



Overhead of the wreck of the Halifax, family members emotionally lay flowers, filmed by the France 3 Bretagne team.

## The inauguration of a memorial plaque at the entrance of the « Fort d'Arboulé ».

The highlight of these days was undoubtedly the inauguration of a plaque at the entrance of the « Fort d'Arboulé » ; ironically, it was decided to place the plaque on the remains of a German blockhaus. Arriving very early in the morning, our small team set up all the facilities to welcome officials and the general public. The event having been relayed by the local media, we were hoping for many visitors and we were not disappointed.



A large crowd, informed by local media, gathered at the entrance of the « Fort d'Arboulé » to attend the commemoration.



# August 16-17, 2024 : tribute to the crew of the Halifax 'If any'

by **Benoît Paquet** (photos of the collective organizing the event, unless otherwise stated)



The speeches followed one another with great solemnity and emotion in tribute to the crew who tragically lost their lives ; here Gilles Lurton, Mayor of Saint-Malo (in the box Benoit Paquet).

After the arrival of the officials, we started the ceremony with a succession of speeches : the Mayor of Saint-Malo, Mr Gilles Lurton, myself to recall the day of August 31, 1944, Lieutenant-Colonel Dhillon and finally our friends Thierry and Olivier who recounted the long search and the discovery of the wreck of the aircraft in 2018. At the end of these speeches, in a perfect timing driven by Véronique Pelichet, master of ceremonies, we had organized the flight of a legendary aircraft, the **Boeing PT-17 Stearman**, flown by Jérôme Joulain (Aerostear), a biplane famous for having been the military training aircraft for USAAF and also RCAF pilots before and during the Second World War.



Following the speeches, a Boeing PT-17 Stearman, flown by Jérôme Joulain, made a few passes along the edge of the « Fort d'Arboulé » and over the wreck of the Halifax, in memory of its crew.



Dawna Lee and Graham Frost, descendants of airmen Hawkins and Garrett, emotionally unveil the plaque erected in memory of the crew of the Halifax 'If any'.

We then proceeded to the unveiling of the memorial plaque in the presence of the families, followed by the Canadian, English and French national anthems, in the presence, among others, of the Mayor of Saint-Malo and the Sub-Prefect, Mr Philippe Brugnot.



To the sound of the Canadian, English and French national anthems, after a wreath-laying ceremony, officials and military personnel, in the presence of the airmen's families, pay tribute to the sacrifice of the crew of Squadron 433.

Throughout the ceremony, we were accompanied by the « Bagad des Anciens de Lann-Bihoué », whose musical performance effectively contributed to the success of our event, provoking beautiful emotions, particularly during a magnificent « Amazing grace ».



# August 16-17, 2024 : tribute to the crew of the Halifax 'If any'

by **Benoît Paquet** (photos of the collective organizing the event, unless otherwise stated)



The Bagad « Les Anciens de Lann-Bihoué » accompanied the ceremony, much to the delight of the participants. They are playing here at the entrance to the « fort d'Arboulé ».

Following the ceremonies, families and contributors gathered at the Domaine des Mauriers for a well-deserved cocktail lunch. This was an opportunity for our friends from « Les Anciens de Lann-Bihoué » to perform a superb recital and for the participants to improvise a Breton dance. ■



It was in a warm atmosphere that families and organizers of the event improvised a Breton dance to the sound of bombardes, bagpipes and other drums from the Bagad « Les Anciens de Lann-Bihoué ».



Dawna Lee (3<sup>rd</sup> from left), who came from Canada to pay tribute to her relative James Hawkins, probably didn't think she would learn a Breton dance.

This tribute to the airmen of Halifax MZ879 of 433 Squadron RCAF was probably the most important event of 2024 for our association ; it was the result of several years of research, preparation and organization. This is why we feel it is very important to thank the many contributors to the success of this event :

- My comrades from the organizing collective : Olivier Brichet, Dominique Busnouv, Michel Coué, Jean-Michel Martin, Véronique Pelichet, Yves-Malo Ploton, Thierry Troitin, assisted by Marianne Bliman and Jean Simoni.
  - Shirley Stone and Jonathan Ives or their assistance in tracing the families.
  - the SNSM and its president Eric Verrière.
  - The Maritime Gendarmerie, in particular Warrant Officer Eudes Minaud.
  - the Royal Canadian Air Force, in particular Lieutenant-Colonel Aaron Dhillon, Commanding Officer of Squadron 433.
  - the « Armée de l'Air et de l'Espace », in particular Colonel Patrice Jézéquel, Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Guilbaud, Major Gaëlle Vigy, Warrant Officer Gérald Lemaître as well as the airmen and airwomen of the DA 928 present on August 31, 2024.
  - Alain Lecharpentier who installed the memorial plaque.
  - the Town Hall of Saint-Malo, in particular Mr Gilles Lurton.
  - the « Conservatoire du Littoral », and more specifically Mr Gwenal Hervouet
  - the « Bagad des Anciens de Lann-Bihoué », in particular Bernard Misériaux, whose grandmother, a Resistance fighter, did not return from the Ravensbrück camp.
  - the « Comité de Liaison des Associations Patriotiques », Marc Jean, its président, and the flag bearers of Saint-Malo.
  - ABSA 39-45 members Pierre Mahé, Dominique Renaud, Danny Bouché, Dominique Godde, Guy Castel and Bruno Rat.
- And of course...
- the families of the crew present in Saint-Malo but also those who did not come but who helped us to build this tribute by providing us with a lot of information : Graham, Nicholas, James and Alex Frost, Dawna Lee and Mishen Pastitshi, Debby Smith and Kiel Pharis.

In memory of **Carol Frost**, daughter of Sergeant Garrett, who unfortunately passed away two months before our event.





# August 16-17, 2024 : tribute to the crew of the Halifax 'If any'

by **Benoît Paquet** (photos of the collective organizing the event, unless otherwise stated)

In memory of the crew of the Handley Page Halifax MZ879 "If any" whose supreme sacrifice was publicly honored for the first time, 80 years later, to whom a memorial site has finally been dedicated and who thus definitively enter the history of Saint-Malo : **James Ralph Beveridge, Charles William Garrett, Lorne Stanley Guernsey, Frederic Cuthbert Harman, James Reid Hawkins, Wendell Lyall Long and George William Pharis.**



On August 30, 2024, Lieutenant Colonel Dhillon, accompanied by a British exchange officer (one of the crew members of our Halifax MZ879 was English) performed a flight in a McDonnell Douglas CF 18 at 33,000 feet and Mach 1.08, carrying the framed photo of the crew that we had donated.

**A magnificent final tribute to this crew who fell on August 31, 1944. A big thank you to our two officers for this wonderful initiative !**

RCAF photo via le Lt-Col. Aaron Dhillon



# 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Vannes airfield (56)

by **Benoît Paquet** (photos by the author unless otherwise stated)

Vannes Airfield is now familiar to many of our readers, thanks to the numerous exhibitions we've held there over the years—often at the invitation of local organizations.

But 2024 was a year apart. To mark the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the airfield's liberation, our friends at the Morbihan Aéro Musée organized a truly remarkable event on **September 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>**. This exceptional exhibition went beyond the museum's usual offerings—housed in the historic hangars once home to German Heinkel He 111 bombers during WWII. **Jean Gosselin** and his team brought together a range of passionate groups, including Air Memorial, **ABSA 39-45**, and the Ploeren-based RMP (Reconstitution Mémoire Passion), that recreated a full American military camp on-site.



Jean Gosselin, president of the Morbihan Aéro Musée, opens the exhibition with a speech, flanked by local officials. Just behind the tents stands the La Ferté-Alais Spitfire—the undisputed star of the event.

The centerpiece of the weekend was undoubtedly the arrival of a real Spitfire from La Ferté-Alais. Its dramatic entrance—escorted by a French Air Force Rafale—left a lasting impression.



Members of the RMP association brought WWII history to life with their impressive American military camp setup.



Daniel Chateau (left) and Benoît Paquet welcome visitors and showcase the work of ABSA 39-45. Several aircraft parts, including the large fuel tank from a German fighter, added authenticity to the display.

The weather couldn't have been better, and everything came together to make this celebration of WWII aviation a great success. We set up under a genuine WWII American tent to greet the public. Longtime ABSA 39-45 members **Daniel Chateau** and **Dominique Renaud** were on hand, and as always, we had the pleasure of connecting with many fascinating visitors.



Dominique Renaud and Benoît Paquet could not help taking a souvenir photo with the Spitfire that had come from La Ferté-Alais on the occasion.

ABSA 39-45 extends heartfelt thanks to the Morbihan Aéro Musée—and especially to Jean Gosselin—for the kind invitation and for making this unforgettable experience possible. ■



# Inauguration of a commemorative plaque in Nivillac (56)

by **Benoît Paquet** (photos by the author unless otherwise stated)

The story of **Captain Joseph Rollier** and **Second Lieutenant René Détrait**—who fell in Izernac (Morbihan) on September 22, 1944—is now familiar to many of our readers. We've shared their history in several past newsletters (issues 14, 15, 16, 17, and 22), and a commemoration was held on November 11, 2022, with many members of both families in attendance.



Joseph Rollier (left) and René Détrait (right)

Photos courtesy of Mrs. Duval (Le Souvenir Français du Morbihan) and the Détrait family.

While a memorial already marks the site of their aircraft crash, there had never been an informational display recounting the story of these two airmen in more detail. That changed on **September 22, 2024** - exactly 80 years after the crash. Thanks to the initiative of *Nivillac Histoire et Patrimoine*, led by Julien Chesnin, and in partnership with **ABSA 39-45**, ONACVG, and *Le Souvenir Français*, a new commemorative plaque was unveiled next to the original memorial. The ceremony was attended by the Mayor of Nivillac, local officials, and members of both families.



Julien Chesnin of *Nivillac Histoire et Patrimoine*, joined by local flag bearers, leads the remembrance ceremony for the September 22, 1944 crash.



Children from Nivillac, guided by their mother, reveal the new commemorative plaque.

Following a series of brief speeches, the plaque draped in a French flag - was revealed by a group of local children. These same children, accompanied by Jean Rollier (son of Captain Joseph Rollier), and Marthe-Elisabeth Eladari and Robert Détrait (daughter and son of Second Lieutenant René Détrait), laid a wreath at the foot of the plaque in a moving tribute.



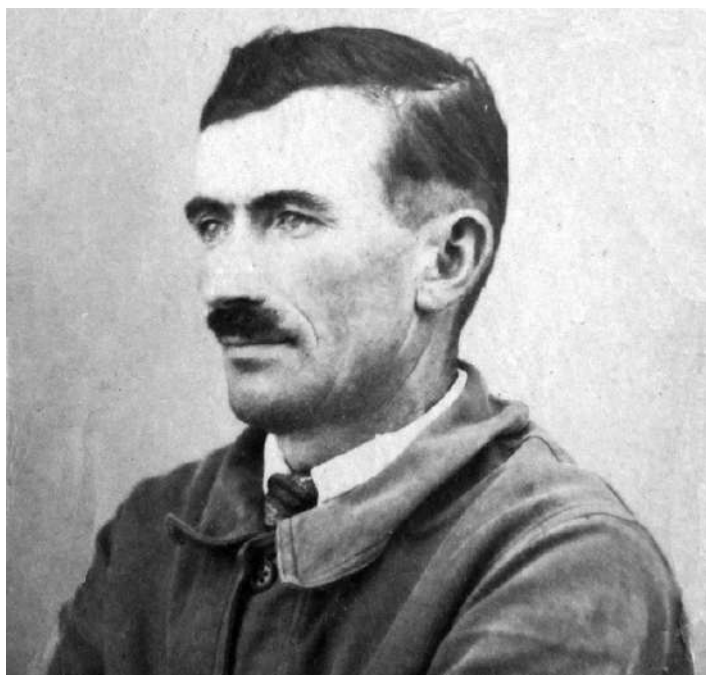
Members of the Rollier and Détrait families gather after the ceremony with the children who unveiled the plaque, along with Benoît Paquet (left) and Julien Chesnin (right).

As always, the ceremony was deeply emotional especially during the singing of *La Marseillaise*. Pierre Mahé and I will cherish the memory of this moment of reflection and remembrance. We extend our sincere thanks to Julien Chesnin and *Nivillac Histoire et Patrimoine* Association for this meaningful initiative, which concluded with a warm and friendly shared lunch. ■



# Conference on the Eugène Moulin affair, September 28, 2024

by Benoît Paquet - ABSA 39-45



Eugène Moulin. Photo Jimmy Tual

Jimmy Tual is a member of ABSA 39-45 but also and above all the president of AFMD 22 (Friends of the Foundation for the Memory of the Deportation). Passionate about local history, Jimmy has worked extensively on the history of civilians and resistance fighters in Côtes-d'Armor during WWII, including **Eugène Moulin**.

Eugène Moulin was arrested at his home on June 29, 1944 by the Gestapo in Saint-Brieuc for having sheltered a group of resistance fighters and the Czech aviator **Robert Ossendorf** in his farm. He then disappeared without a trace.



Airman Robert Ossendorf, known as « Bob », in the cockpit of his Spitfire. Photo Jimmy Tual

It was after a long period of research that in October 2015, Jimmy provided the answer : Eugène Moulin was summarily executed on July 9, 1944 at the entrance of the « Bois de Beauchamp » in Plélo (see our newsletter # 22).

Jimmy Tual recently decided to dedicate a book to this dark and sad affair, a book that he had the opportunity to present at a conference in **Merdrignac on September 28, 2024.** ■

This book (in French only) is still available. You can contact Jimmy Tual directly to get it : [tualjimmy@yahoo.fr](mailto:tualjimmy@yahoo.fr)



Jimmy Tual tells the terrible and dark story of Eugène Moulin on September 28, 2024 in Merdrignac (22). Photo Jimmy Tual



# October 12 and 18 in Vignoc and Langouët (35)

by Guy Castel (photos by the author unless otherwise stated)

## Tribute to Jean-Marie Duchesne, Resistance fighter



One of the first meetings in Langouët in September 2024, to plan the commemorative days of Vignoc and Langouët on October 12 and 18, 2024. Annie Detoc, the initiator of the project, Jean-Luc Dubois, mayor of Langouët, Daniel Houitte, mayor of Vignoc, Jean-Loup Hardy, president of the CATM of Vignoc and Roland Vinet, municipal councilor in Langouët.

## The Vignoc ceremonies of Saturday, October 12

The 80<sup>th</sup> ceremonies of the Liberation Anniversary began at the Vignoc war memorial on Saturday, October 12 at 11 a.m. with a speech by Jean-Loup Hardy, president of the CATM (Combatants of Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco) association in the town :

« As part of the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Liberation of France, the municipality and the CATM association were keen to join in the commemorations. We are gathered this morning to honor the memory of three of our fellow citizens who died for France, whose names appear on the war memorial :

**Jean Baptiste Toussaint Gernigon** was born in 1912 in Saint-Brieuc-des-Iffs, assigned to the 5<sup>th</sup> « Régiment de Dragons Portés », killed at « Les Ors », in the North, on May 17, 1940.

**Louis Jean-Marie Baudais** was born in « la Dorbelais en Vignoc » in 1913, assigned to the 106<sup>th</sup> « Régiment d'Artillerie Lourde », killed at Malo-les-Bains, in the North, on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1940.

**Jules Eugène Alexandre Josse** was born in Tinténac in 1908, assigned to the 330<sup>th</sup> « Régiment d'Infanterie », killed at Bad-Durkheim, in Germany, on March 18, 1945.

We do not forget them, like those who contributed, often in the shadows, and sometimes even at the risk of their lives, to resist against the occupier.

Born in Vignoc, **Jean Duchesne**, from « la Bruère », was one of them. He joined « La Mézière » Resistance network in 1943. One of his most remarkable feats of arms was the rescue of two American airmen : Harry Meeker and Blaine Barritt, who fell under the fire of anti-aircraft guns and German aircraft on June 12, 1944. For three days, he hid them, housed them, and fed them at Placis-Suzain in Langouët, with his wife Marguerite. He then entrusted them to the FFI Resistance network in La Mézière. Thanks to him, they returned safe at first to England and then to the United States, at the beginning of August 1944.



Jean-Loup Hardy, president of CATM of Vignoc, in the middle of his tribute speech.

Before laying flowers on his grave in the cemetery, I would like to share with you the results of recent research : Jean Duchesne participated in the Battle of Maison-Blanche in Saint Grégoire on August 1, 1944. He kept the military plaque of Edward Cross, killed in his tracked vehicle by German anti-tank rocket launchers. For these feats of arms, he received an American certificate of recognition, signed by Eisenhower, and numerous French medals.

Thank you for being here, and to you, the flag bearers of Vignoc and La Mézière, for being here today to pay tribute to our people of Vignoc who contributed to the Liberation of France ».

On this occasion, a delegation of children from the Simone Veil primary school, accompanied by the



# October 12 and 18 in Vignoc and Langouët (35)

by Guy Castel (photos by the author unless otherwise stated)

Director Tiphaine Bodin, read Paul Eluard's poem « Freedom ».



In parade, led by flag bearers, delegations from the CATM of Vignoc and the UNC of La Mézière, followed by guests, headed towards the cemetery.



At the foot of Jean-Marie Duchesne's grave, his great-granddaughter Lilly-Rose Ravet laid a wreath.



And his grandson, Sylvain Duchesne, made a speech on his grandfather's career as a member of the Resistance.

« My grandfather Jean-Marie Duchesne.

My grandfather was born on January 12, 1902, in La Bruère-en-Vignoc. His parents were farmers. He successfully passed his primary school certificate. He completed his military service in the 13<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment in 1922 and 1923. Demobilized, he married Marguerite Guilmois in 1924 and worked as a road mender on the national road 137 from Rennes to Saint Malo from 1939.

Then they moved to Placis-Suzain in Langouët. In June 1940, they distinguished themselves during the Occupation by arresting a Belgian spy named Schneder. In November 1943, he joined the resistance group in La Mézière, commanded by Lieutenant Ferdinand Le Behec and Léon Busnel. According to the statement by group leader Le Behec: « due to his position as a road worker on the national road 137, he became a valuable intelligence agent ».

On June 12, 1944, he rescued two American airmen who had fallen at Ronceray in Vignoc. He sheltered them for two days and three nights at Placis-Suzain in Langouët and then entrusted them to the resistance network in La Mézière. The airmen then returned to Romillé and then Saint Thual before joining the American liberation column at Quiou on August 3, 1944. On June 18, 1944, at kilometer marker 65,700 (near today's Rouxel transport company) he took part in an attempt to derail the Ille et Vilaine Transport tramway, or Petit Tacot, loaded with ammunition.



# October 12 and 18 in Vignoc and Langouët (35)

by **Guy Castel** (photos by the author unless otherwise stated)

Caught off guard by German forces, he managed to escape despite being wounded by multiple gunshots. On July 5, 1944, near the same spot, Lieutenant Le Béhec later testified : a German truck was hit in a machine-gun attack. There was a mine inside the truck that detonated. Duchesne quickly began clearing the road, and while doing so, he discreetly retrieved a German rifle and a submachine gun. He was immediately suspected by the German officer leading the convoy, who threatened to shoot him three separate times with his revolver. But he never admitted to taking the weapons and somehow managed to sneak them away, hidden in a basket of dishes, right under the Germans' noses.

On August 1, 1944, he took part in the Battle of Maison-Blanche in Saint-Grégoire, where he recovered the military ID tag of American soldier Edward Cross, who had been killed in his armoured vehicle. Beginning on August 3, Duchesne joined the La Mézière FFI in hunting down German troops who were still hiding in the woods and fields of the area. My grandfather, Jean-Marie Duchesne, whom everyone simply called Jean, was the father of four sons : Marcel, Albert, Jean, and Maurice. For his wartime actions, he was awarded several French decorations, as well as an American certificate of recognition signed by General Eisenhower.

He passed away on July 17, 1990, in Bain-de-Bretagne and is buried alongside my grandmother, Marguerite, who died on August 4, 1996. I'm deeply moved by today's tribute. I want to thank the municipality and Jean-Loup Hardy for creating the commemorative plaque that now stands in Placis-Suzain, ensuring my grandfather's name will live on.

Thank you all ».



Guy Castel, Daniel Houitte and Jean-Loup Hardy.  
Photo courtesy of Christian Pedron

Back at the Émile Lemétayer Hall, Mayor Daniel Houitte welcomed guests before handing the microphone to Guy Castel, one of the co-authors of « Resistance and American Airmen – Northern Ille-et-Vilaine, 1944 ».



Guy Castel thanks the towns of Vignoc and Langouët, with Benoît Paquet at his side.  
Photo courtesy of Christian Pedron

He began:

« First, I'd like to thank the towns of Vignoc and Langouët for supporting this project, which was initiated by Deputy Annie Destoc of Langouët. She took advantage of a 2023 government circular encouraging municipalities to host events marking the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Liberation.

Langouët was among the first to sign up - and one of only 40 municipalities in the department to show interest, and among just 11 to receive a Prefectural grant. Together, Langouët and Vignoc were awarded € 373 in funding for their efforts."

Pierre Mahé and I worked hard to bring together as many elements of this era as possible: objects, aircraft models, and informative displays. Benoît Paquet dedicated several hours to helping us design the book. We were also supported by Noël Rouillard and Eric Joret, who shared their expertise. In the end, it was a whole chain of goodwill that made this event a success. Thank you all ».

Guy Castel then invited Benoît Paquet to present the « Association Bretonne du Souvenir Aérien 39-45 (ABSA 39-45) ».

He explained that the organization has been researching and reconstructing the stories of airmen lost in Brittany and the Loire Valley during World War II for over 20 years.



# October 12 and 18 in Vignoc and Langouët (35)

by **Guy Castel** (photos by the author unless otherwise stated)



A large crowd listens attentively to the various speeches before discovering the exhibition.

Photo collection Christian Pedron

Afterward, a friendly reception gave guests the opportunity to explore the exhibition, which featured eleven display panels created by Guy Castel, historical artifacts from the collection of Pierre Mahé (co-author of the book), and personal documents from Sylvain Duchesne's private archives.



Pierre Mahé and Guy Castel, authors of "Resistance and American Airmen - Northern Ille-et-Vilaine, 1944", took part in the traditional book-signing session. Photo credit : Benoît Paquet collection



Visitors were especially drawn to the displays recounting the story of Jean-Marie Duchesne. Photo credit : Benoît Paquet collection

On October 21, seven classes from the Simone Veil Primary School toured the exhibition.

On that day, members of Jean-Marie Duchesne's family gathered around the mannequin dressed in a 1944 American military uniform from Pierre Mahé's collection.



A mannequin dressed in a 1944 U.S. airman's uniform (from the Pierre Mahé collection) stood on display. In front of it was a piece of metal from the B-24 Liberator that crashed in Bonnemain (35) on June 12, 1944. Behind it, the exhibition panels summarized the book "Resistance and American Airmen - Northern Ille-et-Vilaine, 1944."

Photo credit : Benoît Paquet collection





# October 12 and 18 in Vignoc and Langouët (35)

by Guy Castel (photos by the author unless otherwise stated)



October 12, 2024 – At the "Émile Lemétayer" Hall in Vignoc, the book "Resistance and American Airmen – Northern Ille-et-Vilaine, 1944" was officially launched. Pictured : Benoît Paquet, president of the "Association Bretonne du Souvenir Aérien 39-45", with Pierre Mahé and Guy Castel. Photo credit : Benoît Paquet collection

## The ceremonies continued on Friday, October 18 in Langouët

As a prelude to the commemorative day, Mélanie Brissart's class of 28 CM1–CM2 pupils from the Janusz Korczak School visited the exhibition on Thursday, October 17. Two students read aloud from books belonging to their families: Hugo presented an *Atlas Junior* book on World War II, and Soreig read from *The Diary of Anne Frank*.



Hugo and his *Atlas Junior* in presence of Mélanie Brissart.



Soreig presenting *The Diary of Anne Frank*.



Mélanie Brissart's CM1–CM2 class of 28 students.

On Friday, October 18, the official commemorations began with a tribute at the war memorial, where Jean-Luc Dubois, the mayor of Langouët and vice-president of the Val d'Ille-Aubigné community of communes, gave a speech :

« As part of the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Liberation of France, we gather here this evening to honour the memory of those from our town who fell in World War II, whose names are inscribed on this memorial :

René-Marie-François Garel, born February 14, 1920, at La Motte du Tertre in Langouët. Called up for service in 1940, he was assigned to the 1st Divisional Artillery Regiment. Taken prisoner, he died of illness while in captivity on January 1, 1941, at the Altmark POW Lazarett in Saxony-Anhalt, Germany.

Jean Dieudonné de Laubier, born June 17, 1897, in Saint-Méloir-des-Ondes. A resident of Coudray, Langouët, he enlisted in 1914 at age 17 and served in the artillery during World War I. By January 1940, he was commanding Bombardment Group II/34. He died in combat on May 14, 1940, when his plane was shot down by German anti-aircraft fire while bombing bridges in Sedan.

Let us never forget them, nor any of our war dead. And let us also remember those who, often in secrecy and at great personal risk, chose to resist the occupier.



# October 12 and 18 in Vignoc and Langouët (35)

by **Guy Castel** (photos by the author unless otherwise stated)

This is the case of Jean-Marie Duchesne, born in Vignoc, who joined the Resistance network of La Mézière in 1943.

One of his most remarkable feats of arms was the rescue of two American airmen, Harry Meeker and Blaine Barritt, who came under fire from German anti-aircraft guns and fighter planes on June 12, 1944. For three days, Jean-Marie and his wife Marguerite hid, housed, and fed them at their farm in Placis-Suzain, in Langouët. He then entrusted them to the FFI Resistance network in La Mézière. Thanks to his courage, the two airmen made it safely back to England and then the United States in early August 1944.

Research has been carried out into this heroic episode. An exhibition, prepared by local historians in collaboration with the Vignoc Veterans Association and the municipalities of Vignoc and Langouët, is now on display in the hall. Before concluding, we must remember all those men and women who, as soldiers or members of the Resistance, acted in the shadows during World War II. Their values live on in the words still engraved on the pediments of our town halls :

*Liberty* – for which they fought, despite hardship and suffering, in the name of independence and human dignity.

*Fraternity* – shown in the mutual support within the Resistance, and in the rescue of those unknown Americans, even at the risk of their own lives and those of their families.

How can we not recall the words of André Malraux, in his speech for the entry of Jean Moulin's ashes into the Panthéon : « This feeling without which the Resistance would never have existed is perhaps simply the invincible accent of fraternity ».

On this October 18, let us remember all those, across the globe today, who are still fighting for liberty and fraternity, in every country at war.

Thank you all for your presence, and a heartfelt thanks to the flag bearers from Langouët, Gévezé, Vignoc, and the Souvenir Français for honouring the people of Langouët and Vignoc who helped liberate France. ■



Laying of wreaths by Éléonore-Marie Aurus (Souvenir Français), or Jean-Luc Dubois, and Deputy Mayor Florence Flaux.



Reading of Paul Éluard's poem "Liberty" by the 28 children from Mrs. Brissart's CM1-CM2 class at Janusz Korczak School.



Before a talk by Guy Castel and Pierre Mahé, the officials warmly thanked the event organizers : Langouët Mayor Jean-Luc Dubois, Ludovic Coulombel (Vice-President of the Departmental Council, pictured with microphone and a passionate advocate of contemporary history), and Anne-Sophie Patru, Senator of Ille-et-Vilaine and Mayor of Pleumeleuc.



# A new book in the ABSA 39-45 collection



After several years of research led by Guy Castel correspondent for Ouest-France in northern Ille-et-Vilaine and now a member of ABSA 39-45, with the help of Pierre Mahé, a founding member of ABSA 39-45, a remarkable new book has just been released : *Résistance et aviateurs américains - Nord de l'Ille-et-Vilaine, 1944*.

It took these two passionate historians 40 years of investigation to retrace the fate of three American airmen who crashed in the countryside around Vignoc during the Nazi occupation. The crew survived the crash of their B-24 bomber "Do Jim Don" and began an incredible journey aided by local Resistance networks.



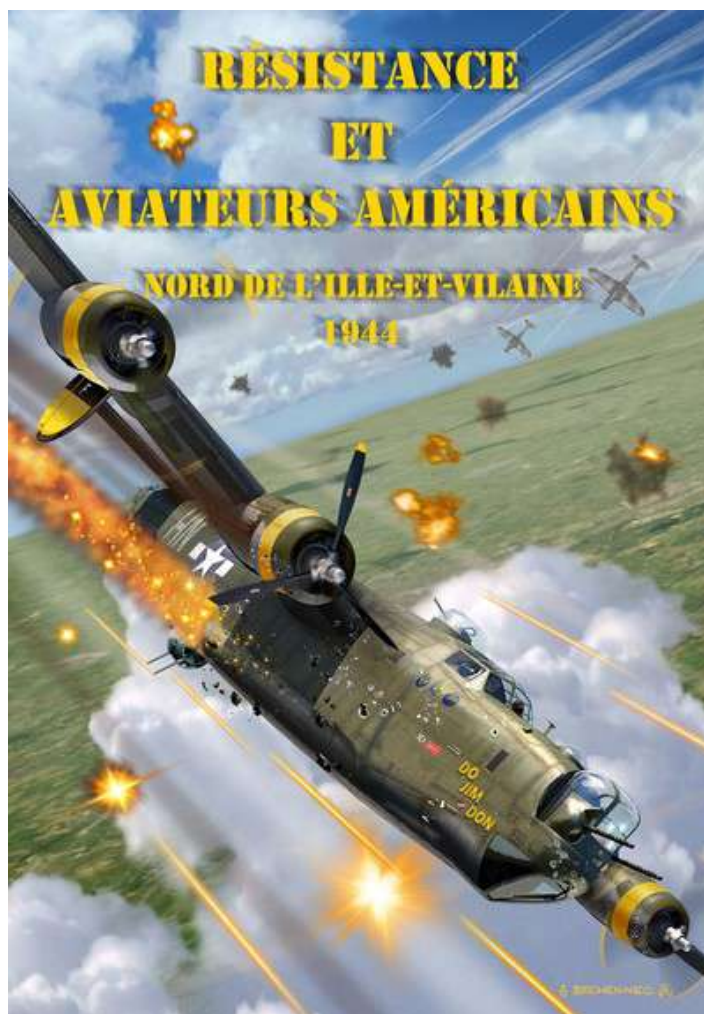
From June 12 to August 3, 1944, key events unfolded involving the F.T.P. and F.F.I. Resistance groups - many of them long forgotten by today's generation. In this 80th year of the Liberation, Guy Castel and Pierre Mahé pay tribute to the humble Bretons who risked everything so that the small, often silent stories of resistance could shape the larger narrative of freedom.

Featuring unpublished texts and illustrations, this volume stands out as a new reference in the vast landscape of World War II history in Northern Ille-et-Vilaine.

- Cover illustration : *Daniel Béchenne*

- Aircraft profiles: *Jean-Marie Guillou*

Two illustrators widely respected among aviation history enthusiasts.



You can order this 152-page book (21 x 29.7 cm format, in French only) now at the price of :

- 15 € for ABSA 39-45 members.
- 20 € for non-members
- Shipping costs to France : - by post : 7 €  
- by Mondial Relay : 5 €

For any order and information about shipping costs out of France, please contact Benoît Paquet : [b.paquet@orange.fr](mailto:b.paquet@orange.fr) or +33 (0)682 860 391



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## In brief

by **Benoît Paquet - ABSA 39-45** (photos collection Benoit Paquet - ABSA 39-45)

### • Châteaubriant (44) Associations Forum

In 2024, for the very first time, we took part in the **Châteaubriant** Associations Forum, held on August 31 at the Halle de Béré. Nearly a hundred local associations were represented, and the event drew a large crowd. **Dominique Renaud** and I were pleased to host a stand to promote our activities to the people of Châteaubriant. To capture attention, we displayed various aircraft components and informational banners.



*Benoît Paquet and Dominique Renaud awaiting visitors at the ABSA 39-45 stand.*

It turned out to be a great opportunity—not only to engage with the public—but also to meet Lionel Baudoin, president of the RSA (Air Sports Network) for the Loire region. He decided to join the ABSA 39-45. We also met Eddie Padre, a digital systems instructor at Lycée Saint-Félix in Nantes, who invited us to give a talk to high school students preparing for the BIA (Aeronautical Initiation Certificate) in Ancenis (see below).

### • R.S.A. « Pays de la Loire » Rally in Ancenis (44) – October 5, 2024

The RSA is a French federation that brings together aircraft builders and vintage aircraft enthusiasts. **Lionel Baudoin**, whom we met at the Châteaubriant forum, invited us to take part in his annual RSA rally, which was held at the Ancenis airfield on Saturday, October 5, 2024. It was a great chance to introduce ourselves



*Benoît Paquet, Daniel Chateau and Lionel Baudoin behind the ABSA 39-45 stand in the hangars of the Ancenis flying club.*

to aviation enthusiasts from across the region. Daniel Chateau and I were there with a selection of aircraft parts, scale models, and our now-familiar banners to share information about our work with the attending pilots. By the end of the day, Lionel had decided to join our association—which we were absolutely thrilled about. ■



*A vibrant display of colorful aircraft beneath a stunning blue sky !*



## In brief

by **Benoît Paquet - ABSA 39-45** (photos collection Benoit Paquet - ABSA 39-45 - unless otherwise stated)

### • Talk at Saint-Félix High School, Nantes (44)

We first met Eddie Padre, a digital systems teacher at Saint-Félix-La-Salle High School in Nantes, during the Châteaubriant Associations Forum. A passionate enthusiast of both aviation and history, Eddie prepares his students for the BIA (Aeronautical Initiation Certificate) through flying sessions at the Ancenis flying club and flight simulator exercises.



Eddie Padre (1<sup>st</sup> on the right), teacher at « Saint-Félix-La-Salle » in Nantes, with young people preparing for the B.I.A..

He invited us to present our historical and archaeological research to his students - which I was delighted to do. I traveled to Nantes on October 3, 2024, to share our work and engage with a small group of curious and enthusiastic students. I would like to thank Eddie Padre and the Saint-Félix High School for the invitation and for the warm welcome they extended to us.



Benoît Paquet (right), happy to present the activities of ABSA 39-45 to the young students of « Saint-Félix-La-Salle ».

### • Harti Schmiedel at the Mont d'Huisnes Mausoleum

Harti Schmiedel is a well-known figure within ABSA 39-45. It was the discovery of his aircraft and remains in 2004 that inspired Daniel Dahiot, Pierre Mahé, Bernard Gislard, and a few others to found the association. Over

the years, this story also inspired the writing of several books about the German pilot who was shot down near Le Rheu, close to Rennes, on June 12, 1944. These books are currently out of print and being revised.

In August 2023, the Berlin-based communications agency **beier+wellach** reached out to us on behalf of the **Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V.**, the German War Graves Commission. The organization had launched a project to enhance the German war cemetery at Mont d'Huisnes in the Manche department (Normandy). Part of the project involved displaying portraits of fallen German soldiers on digital screens at the site's entrance. Among those selected was Harti Schmiedel. The agency asked us to provide information and photographs related to him.



Touchscreen displays with headphones allow visitors to hear the personal stories of several German soldiers buried at Mont d'Huisnes — including Harti Schmiedel, featured at the center. The photos are presented in a distinctive graphic style that gives the portraits a unique visual identity.

Photos courtesy of the beier+wellach agency, Berlin, Germany.

The project was completed in July 2024. **Harti Schmiedel** is prominently featured, and ABSA 39-45 is credited as the source of the photographs. ■





# Welcome to ...

by Benoît Paquet

## 2024 has brought many new members to our association much to our delight !

Five passionate individuals joined us in the first half of the year (see Newsletter #26), and five more came on board in the second half. Let's hear from them directly !

### • Alain Tacka, Plancoët (22)

"As a young man, I discovered the history of aviation through the wonderful documentaries by Daniel Costelle on television. That sparked my interest in WWII warbirds, leading me to explore the topic further through books, DVDs (including those from the Atlas collection), and eventually building 1/48 scale aircraft models. With friends, I also took part in D-Day commemorations in Normandy — even dressing in period costume. I later discovered the incredible air shows at La Ferté-Alais, truly the best of the best! These were narrated by the renowned journalist Bernard Chabbert, whom I had the pleasure of meeting and sharing my passion with.

During the August 4, 2024 commemoration honoring the Resistance fighters executed in Plancoët in 1944, I met Commander Dany Bouché. He invited me to a tribute ceremony for seven Royal Canadian Air Force airmen (from the Halifax bomber lost at Pointe de la Varde). I met some remarkable people there and had enriching conversations — and that's what led me to join the ABSA 39-45 association, to deepen my knowledge through your fascinating research."



Alain Tacka at the ceremony on August 17, 2024 in Saint-Malo.  
Photo Alain Tacka

### • Yves-Malo Ploton, Saint-Malo (35)

"As a resident of Saint-Malo, my passion for both aeronautical history and the history of my hometown naturally led me albeit late in life and despite my age to enthusiastically join ABSA 39-45 in 2024. I was drawn in by the association's deeply human approach, which deserves to be far better known here in Saint-Malo.

What truly inspired me was the monument project, completed 80 years after the fact, honoring the Anglo-Canadian crew of a Royal Canadian Air Force Halifax bomber. The aircraft crashed in the Bay of Saint-Malo on August 31, 1944, during one of the final bombings of Cézembre Island, helping to complete the town's liberation.



Yves-Malo Ploton alongside his wife Catherine  
Photo Yves-Malo Ploton

I was born before World War II and am a civil engineer specializing in aeronautics (Supaéro, class of 1962). I live in Saint-Malo. My father, Robert Ploton (1910–1961), was an Air Force officer and Halifax bomber pilot with the French Heavy Groups in the Royal Air Force from 1944 to 1945. He was made a Commander of the Legion of Honor. My mother, Marie-Thérèse Bazin (1909–1946), came from one of Saint-Malo's old families, whose members have played key roles in the city's economic, maritime, and social life since the 16th century. I'm a member of the following associations :

- Breton Association for the Remembrance of Aerial History 1939–1945 (ABSA 39-45)
- Association of Veterans and Friends of the French Heavy Bomber Groups (AAAGL)
- Historical and Archaeological Society of the Saint-Malo District (SHAASM)
- Association of Descendants of Privateer Captains (ADCC)
- Association of Descendants of Jacques Cartier and His Companions (ADFJCC)"



# Welcome to ...

by Benoît Paquet

## • Guy Castel, La Mézière (35)

"I'm 76 years old and have always been passionate about local history. Since moving to La Mézière (13 km north of Rennes) in 1981, I've spent time exploring the countryside, meeting some of the last living witnesses of World War II and the Resistance. That's how I had the pleasure of meeting Pierre Mahé from ABSA 39-45, who has been researching the fate of U.S. airmen shot down in northern Ille-et-Vilaine since the 1980s. Daniel Dahiot also supported my investigations—both into the Heinkel He 111 that was shot down over La Mézière in August 1940, and into the U.S. airmen aboard the B-24 that crashed in Langan on June 12, 1944. More recently, we worked to identify an American GI, Edward Cross, who was killed on August 1, 1944 at Maison-Blanche in Saint-Grégoire.



Guy Castel at home, in front of a thick file, the fruit of years of research that allowed him to write his book. Photo Guy Castel

In recent years, our research into the journey and sheltering of three U.S. airmen who fell north of Rennes between June and August 1944 led us to propose a publication through the association. Benoît Paquet, president of ABSA 39-45, received our work with enthusiasm. After an initial print run of 250 copies, the book quickly sold out and we reprinted another 100 copies. Collaborating with ABSA 39-45 has opened new possibilities. We're now looking into the crash of a B-24 in Bonnemain and the Resistance networks in the Hédé-Bazouges area (35).

For me, joining ABSA 39-45 felt like a natural next step, thanks to the warm welcome and valuable guidance I've received. Thank you—and long live the association ! "

## • Lionel Baudoin, Carbay (49)

"My name is Lionel Baudoin, and I'm retired. I've been following the work of the ABSA 39-45 association for some time now. Like many of you, my parents lived through the dramatic events of World War II. Out of respect for their experience - and in honor of what they went through or contributed - I've decided to join the association.



Another reason is my passion for aeronautics, both in practice and in history. I represent a regional branch of the RSA 'Pays de la Loire'—an association that brings together aircraft builders and collectors. It keeps me quite busy, but also gives me the opportunity to invite ABSA 39-45 to participate in certain aviation gatherings. These are the reasons I'm happy to be among you today."



Daniel Chateau (left) and Lionel Baudoin represented ABSA 39-45 at the association's stand during the RSA "Pays de la Loire" gathering in Ancenis (44).



# Welcome to ...

by Benoît Paquet

## • Jean Simoni, Montferrat (83)

"I first heard about ABSA 39-45 through Olivier [Brichet]. What really drew me to your work is the historical research—both into the lives of the pilots and the aircraft wrecks beneath the sea. In short, uncovering the stories of those who helped liberate us.

Then came the event in Saint-Malo - the swift preparation of the memorial panel (!!!), and most of all, the presence of the families at the ceremony. It was deeply moving. That's what convinced me to join the association."

## • Pierrick Lefeuvre, Roz-Landrieux (35)

"I'll admit I don't know much about aviation. But Jeannot [Jean Simoni] had often mentioned that he went diving with a friend and had explored a wreck off the coast of Saint-Malo. At one point, I told him about an osteopath I knew in Dol-de-Bretagne, and as we talked, we realized his diving friend and the osteopath were the same person - Thierry [Trotin].

Thierry then told me about the upcoming inauguration at Pointe de la Varde. Being a native of Paramé, part of Saint-Malo, I helped with the installation of the commemorative plaque and, of course, attended the ceremony. That's how I discovered ABSA 39-45 - and how I became a member."



Jean Simoni (left) and Pierrick Lefeuvre - two longtime friends - decided to join ABSA 39-45 together in 2024.



## BROCHURE - "Le SUSFU – Edern, 23 Janvier 1943"

32 pages, **in French** – Format: 21 x 29.7 cm

This brochure retraces the final moments of the Boeing B-17 *SUSFU*, which crashed in Edern (near Brest) on January 23, 1943, during a bombing raid on Lorient led by the 303rd Bomb Group. It features the compelling story of Radio Operator Sergeant Sebastian Vogel, who managed to escape and make his way across the Channel to England.



### Price :

- ABSA 39-45 member price : € 7
- Non-member price : €10
- Shipping (France) : € 4

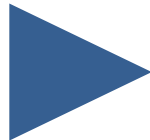
## DANS LE CIEL DE FRANCE

### Histoire de la JG 2 "Richthofen"

By Erik Mombeeck and Jean-Louis Roba

[Volume 1: 1934-1940]

300 pages, **in French** – Format: 21 x 29.7 cm



Erik Mombeeck and Jean-Louis Roba are widely recognized specialists on the Luftwaffe. This book is the first volume in their meticulously researched series on the famed JG 2 "Richthofen" fighter wing. Both authors have generously assisted ABSA 39-45 in past crash investigations in Brittany.

This volume covers the early years of JG 2 - from its formation through the end of 1940 - including its role in the Battle of France and the Battle of Britain. The account is richly detailed, based on numerous firsthand testimonies and archival documents. A must-read for enthusiasts of WWII aviation history.

### Price:

- ABSA 39-45 member price : € 30
- Non-member price : € 35
- Shipping (France) : € 10 via Colissimo - € 7 via Mondial Relay

## BROCHURE - "Collision mortelle au-dessus de la Manche entre deux Martin B-26 Marauders, 25 Août 1944"

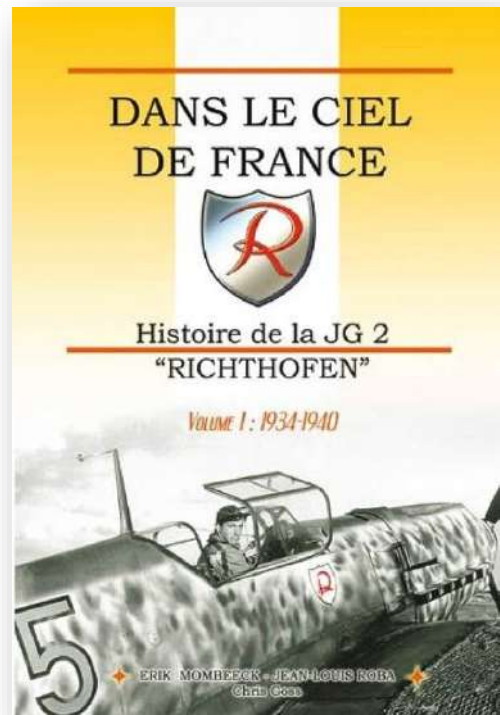
24 pages, **in French** – Format: 21 x 29.7 cm

This brochure presents a detailed account of the mid-air collision between two Martin B-26 Marauders over the English Channel. The aircraft were returning from a bombing mission targeting coastal defenses on the Crozon peninsula. Daniel Dahiot shares the results of his in-depth research into the fate of the crew members involved in this tragic event.



### Price :

- ABSA 39-45 member price : € 7
- Non-member price : €10
- Shipping (France) : € 4



For any book or brochure order, please contact Benoit Paquet : [benoit.paquet@orange.fr](mailto:benoit.paquet@orange.fr) - +33 (0)603 598 572

**Are you interested in the history of World War II in Western France?** Would you like to take part in our ceremonies and events, contribute to our research, or simply support our mission ? Then consider joining **ABSA 39-45**.

**Annual membership : € 32**

For more information, please contact :

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