

Following page is the letter sent to my grandmother Kate Thompson from the Abbé of the village describing the events of the plane being shot down, the dreadful mutilated condition of the crews bodies and the subsequent funerals of the crew

Translation of a Letter from  
ABÉ THEVENIN, dated 9th December, 1949.

Dear Madam. With you, I desire the pleasure with which the authorities inform you of the details concerning your glorious son.

Miniacourt is 43 Kilometres (approx. 26 miles) from Château-sur-Sarthe, and is a little village made illustrious in the Great War of 1914-1918, where the battle was fought for four years. The village was mentioned in Army despatches for its resistance to the enemy and it received the Croix-de-Guerre (something like our George Cross), but was completely destroyed. Today it is rebuilt as new, but with the number of inhabitants reduced to 109. It has the doubtful privilege of possessing, on its territory (or the borders of the ruins of the old battle field), an immense military cemetery for 21,000 French soldiers.

On the 12th of March, 1943, an R.A.F. aeroplane of a formation of bombers on their route to Germany, was hit with bullets to the West Germany. There either by anti-aircraft guns or by an enemy fighter. Badly damaged, it detached itself from the group, lost height, then burst into flames with all its charge of explosives on board. The ball of fire, travelling at a great speed barely missing the tree-tops and small hills of the valley near Miniacourt. Those who remembered the same thing in 1918, realised the coolness of the pilot, but no-one will forget the terrible vision, frightening, illuminating a night of Spring.

Translation of a letter from the local priest.

3. Passing beyond the village, the airplane dived into a lake nearby with a tremendous explosion.

Please excuse these details so painful to the heart of a mother, but you have been waiting impatiently for these details, and in spite of the Nazis' shyness of them, it is for your personal satisfaction, and to the honour of your family.

The Germans who occupied a camp nearby forbade any of the villagers to attempt to recover the airmen but those here who listen only to their patriotism, profited by the right to tell them from the water with the aid of shepherd crooks; the bodies of the valiant airmen were more or less mutilated and cut to pieces in the crash. It needed courage for these simple villagers to risk the reprisals of the Germans. Meanwhile, the Germans closed their eyes to this, and in the presence of the parish priest, who came for the supreme benediction (last blessing) proceeded to bury the seven heroes buried in a corner of the village cemetery.

A platoon of the Reichsbahn (German Army) gave the military honours and a Major Officer read an allocution of the commandant of their death. The villagers, who were used to entering the cemetery during the service permitted to enter the cemetery during the service watched from the shelter of the surrounding hedge, and as soon as the next day came covered the graves with flowers.

Finally Christian, this agricultural community carefully keeps faith by remembrance on the day of the dead - 11th November - official visits are made to the cemetery with a blessing and prayer for the dead, in memory of those who died for the sacrifice given them from the world (it is difficult to translate this, but it won't).

2 means in effect, that they were saved from  
a living death under the Nazis.

After several years, officials from Eugenius  
came and examined the bodies to verify their  
identities and the papers were sent to the  
competent authority.

Now, the graves —, surrounded by a  
cross with inscriptions of the names, continue  
to occupy a square of the previously mentioned  
cemetery which dominates Mamecourt from  
where the enclosed photograph was taken.

I have answered your wishes and  
perhaps you would return a service to the  
other mourning families, as more of them  
have inquired up to the time of your letter  
request, perhaps you would correspond with  
them direct if you think them, or draw  
their attention by newspaper or radio.

120312 F/Sgt. F.B.S. THOMAS SON,  
#9875 Pfc. O/S. A.H. BYNATER,  
152150 Pfc. L.C.S. LUTON,  
517058 F/Sgt. C. STERNART.  
79460 SGT. H.P. H.E. THAWATES  
1014657 F/Sgt. R.M. IRWIN.  
206512 F/Sgt. A. CLIFT.

Tell them that the graves will always  
be well tended.

Mamecourt is disheerited from the point  
of view of communications - as with all the  
country of "la Zone rouge" (desert created by  
the 1st World War) - the most simple way  
to get here is to go by train to Châlons-  
sur-Marne, then to here by taxi.

An excellent inn, kept by Mr. Veroque,  
willingly welcomes each year, the parents of  
soldiers on pilgrimage to the graves of one  
of their loved ones.

> was in effect, that they were saved from  
a living death under the Nazis).

After several years, officials from Eugene  
came and demanded the bodies to verify their  
identity, and the papers were sent to the  
correct authority.

Now, the ground ~~is~~, surrounded by a  
cross with indications of the names, continue  
to occupy a square of the previously mentioned  
cemetery which dominates Imlaissant from  
where the enclosed photograph was taken.

I have answered your wishes, and  
perhaps you would render a service to the  
other surviving families, as more of them  
have enquired up to the time of your letter  
request, perhaps you would correspond with  
them direct if you know them, or draw  
their attention by newspaper or radio.

120342 F/Sgt. F.D.S. THOMASON,  
49876 PFC DR. A.H. BYNATE,  
182150 P/Cpl. L.R. LUTON,  
517059 P/Sgt. C. STEWART  
79560 SGT M.E. THAWATES  
1014657 P/Sgt. R.M. URWIN.  
206512 P/Sgt. A. CLIFT.

Tell them that the graves will always  
be well tended.

Imlaissant is disbarited from the point  
of view of communications - as will all the  
country of "la zone rouge" (desert created by  
the 1st World War) - the most simple way  
to get here is to go by train to Châlons-  
sur-Marne, then to here by taxi.

An excellent man, kept by the Vichy  
military, welcomes each year, the parents of  
soldiers on pilgrimage to the graves of one  
of their loved ones.