



Operation: Mare de Magne

Date: 07/08th August 1944

Unit: No. 75 Squadron

Type: Lancaster I

Serial: HK567

Code: AA-C

Base: RAF Mepal, Cambridgeshire.

Location: North East Le Havre, Mare de Magne (target area)

Pilot: F/O. Godfree Arnold Brunton 150278 RAFVR Evaded capture.

FI/Eng: Sgt. Kenneth Birt Board 3030159 RAFVR Evaded capture.

Nav: F/O. James Stewart Wilkinson NZ/4211042 RNZAF Evaded capture.

Air/Bmr: F/O. Bernard Charles Baker NZ/425447 RNZAF PoW No: 86437
Camp: Stalag Luft Barth and Vogelsang.

W/Op/Air/Gnr: F/O. Jack MacGregor Elliotte NZ/427969 RNZAF Evaded capture.

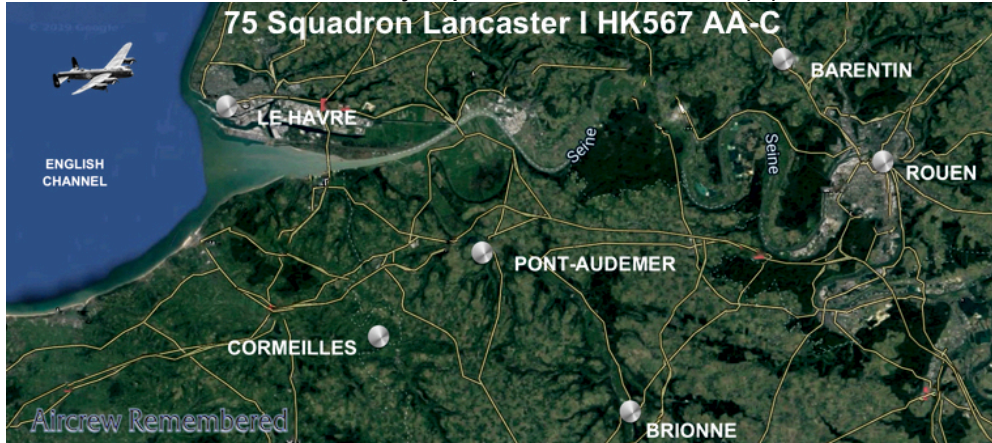
Air/Gnr: Sgt. Thomas John Hall 1895157 RAFVR Age 19. Killed

Air/Gnr: Sgt. Edwin John Hayler 1892380 RAFVR Age 19. Killed

REASON FOR LOSS:

Taking off from RAF Mepal, Cambridgeshire at 22.02 hrs to bomb targets in the Normandy battle area ahead of Allied ground troops. With 1,019 aircraft taking part in carefully controlled bombing points. 660 aircraft actually bombed causing damage to German strong points and roads.

Shot down at 2,000 mts. by Hptm. Heinz Rokker (1) of 2./nJG2 at 23.35 hrs



Statement of F/O. Godfree Arnold Brunton:

'I was pilot of a Lancaster which left RAF Mepal to bomb a tank concentration in a wood near Cae at 22:00 hrs. on the 7th August 1944. We had dropped our bombs when we were attacked by a JU.88, which set the starboard outer engine on fire, we failed to extinguish the fire. I then gave the order to abandon aircraft. I baled out and landed near a farm five miles West of. This was about midnight. I sprained my ankle on landing and had previously been deafened by the explosions.

As soon as I landed a farmer came running up to me and told me to come with him to his house, where he gave me food and drink and civilian clothing. He then went back to the field and collected my parachute, harness and mae west, which he hid in a loft and subsequently, I think, burnt. I spent that night there.

The following morning the farmer came in with Sgt. Board (S/P.G.(-)2192). The farmer said that he and his daughter were going to Cormeilles to try to contact the Maquis. The daughter came back about 11:00 hrs. and told us that the Gestapo were looking for us, and that they had shot ten Frenchmen in Cormeilles in reprisal for their having shot two Germans. She said that her father had been taken by them but he was released about 15:00 hrs. the same day. We left the farm and hid in a ditch in the bottom of a nearby valley.

About 19:00 hrs. another Frenchman appeared and told us to come with him to another farm just East of Cormeilles, where we spent the night in a barn.

This barn appeared to be the local hide-out for the Maquis. Here we were questioned very thoroughly. Next morning (9th August) at about 03:00 hrs. the farmer's son guided us to a little shack on the outskirts of St. Sylvestre-De-Cormeilles about 2 kms. East of Cormeilles. There was a member of the Maquis living there with his wife, and sheltering two members of the 9th Parachute Division Sgt. E. Smith, E and Cpl. G. Wilson and FI/Sgt. Charteris of 57 Squadron. We stayed in this shack for about three days. The head of the local resistance group fed us during this time, bringing the food up from his house. We spent the nights hidden in the surrounding woods merely going into the shack for meals.

On the 12th August the whole resistance group, with their wives, families, and belongings mustered at the shack, because we had been betrayed to the Gestapo by a woman collaborator in return for the freedom of her son. I do not know whether she gave them our names or not. We all left that night and walked about 7 or 8 kms. Through the woods in an Easterly direction, having an armed guard and patrols out to watch for Germans. We arrived at the barn where we stayed for the remainder of that night and the following day. The next night we moved on to another barn about ½ km. away where we stayed for nearly a week.

On the night of 19th August, when I was on patrol I came across a German tank crew who were repairing it in the wood. On the following Monday (21st August) some German artillery officers came and sited a gun close to us in the wood, so we decided to move back to the shack near St. Sylvestre. We moved that night, travelling across country. It was raining very hard so we spent the remainder of the night in the shack. The next morning (22nd August) a German battalion moved into the village, so we took to the woods again. During the day a captain of the Maquis came and told us that we had better give ourselves up as he thought we could not get through, and the resistance group were dispersing. I, being the only one who spoke French, went to the head of the resistance group and told him we would try and walk to the British lines by ourselves. He would not hear of it and said that he and his family and another young couple would continue to look after us.

The young couple took us to a barn where we stayed for about an hour, when the head of the resistance group came rushing up to say that there were some German troops coming up the valley towards us from St. Sylvestre. We crept out to his house on the outskirts of the village, where he hid us in a secret loft which communicated with his bedroom. On 23rd August the Germans retreated from St. Sylvestre, leaving a mortar platoon with their gun about 100 yards below the house. We spent that day and the following night in the loft. The next day (24th August) we crept out into the woods and I spent the following night in a dry cattle pond on top of a hill. Meanwhile the battle was taking place all round us. The next day (25th August) we walked down into Cormeilles and found it had been taken by British troops'.

F/O. James Stewart Wilkinson met British troops on the 14th August 1944.
Shot down again on the 03/04th February 1945 whilst with 15 Squadron.
Taken PoW. Awarded MiD on the 14th June 1945.



Shot down at 2,00 mts by Hptm. Heinz Rokker (1) of 2./NJG2 at 23:35 hrs
(1) Hptm. Heinz Rokker – this was his 39th abschüsse of the war. He was to
survive with a total of 65 confirmed victories. Pictured left (courtesy Tom
Kracker)

Burial details:

Sgt. Thomas John Hall. St. Valery-en-Caux Franco-British Cemetery. Joint
Grave B.23-24. Son of Thomas Patrick and Ada Alice Hall, of Ilford, Essex,
England. Grave inscription: 'You Live With Us In Memory Still, Not Just Today
But Always Will'.

Sgt. Edwin John Hayler. St. Valery-en-Caux Franco-British Cemetery. Joint
Grave B.23-24. Son of Frank and Alice Rose Hayler, of Burpham, Sussex,
England. Grave inscription: 'Our Beloved Son. He Gave His Life For His
Country. Father, Mother And Family'.