

In Memorium

Martin Arthur Thornhill 1922 - 1944

Lest we forget



**At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
We will remember them.**

We will remember them.

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Acknowledgements

In writing this memorial to my cousin Martin I and the rest of Martin's surviving family have been greatly struck by the kindness and generosity of very many people across the world.

I don't propose to name each and every one (the list is quite long) but merely to say the scope of the document would have been greatly reduced without the help of, in no particular order:

Mrs Ann Clark and her mother and father (Gwen and John Verity) (UK)
Pierre Vandervelden, Belgium
RCAF Bomber Command Museum, Nanton, Alberta, Canada (especially Dave Birrell)
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The Royal British Legion.
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Kings School, Rochester, Kent, UK
The Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School, Rochester, Kent (UK)

The existence of very many completely free to access websites, frequently run by voluntary effort and dedicated to telling the human stories of WW2 is quite impressive and their contribution to my search has proved invaluable (not least in making connections with other individuals). I would name a just a few (again not in any particular order):

<http://www.rafcommands.com/forum/>

<http://ww2talk.com/forums/page/index.html>

<http://www.inmemories.com/>

<http://airforce.ca/>

<http://francecrashes39-45.net/>

<http://www.lancaster-archive.com/>

To all of you out there who have, in your own way, contributed to my quest; Thank you.

Jeremy Halliday, Cheshire, United Kingdom.

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Martin was born to Arthur and Alice (née Weekes and known to the family as Doll or Dora*) Thornhill in the then British Crown colony of Hong Kong, while Arthur was serving in the Far East in the British Diplomatic service.

**When Alice herself was born at Tinnoth House, Cuxton Road (now apparently renamed Rochester Road), Halling, Strood, Kent she was immediately wrapped in a soft blanket.*

The Patriarch of the family, Great Grandpa Thomas Weekes, said she looked like a little doll and always called her "Doll" from that moment on – she always said she hated her given name of Alice and her siblings (all seven of them) renamed her Dora as did, in due time, all her nephews and nieces and great nieces and great nephews also).

Incidentally Martin's Great Grandmamma Weekes (née Perceval) was a descendent of a henchman of Guillaume de Normandy (aka William the Conqueror). Said ancestor left his home in Percy, Normandy for a "no-passport" excursion to Hasting in 1066 – the rest, as they say, is history.

The Weekes family had close ties with the Earls of Darnley at whose ancestral seat (nearby Cobham Hall) they were all (including Martin) frequent attendees. A family photograph album from Victorian times shows one of the Weekes family, astride a splendid horse in front of the main entrance door to the house, wearing the uniform of an officer in the Cobham Yeomanry (later the West Kent Yeomanry) which, to this day, is still referred to (within the Weekes family) as the Earl's private army as his family regularly provided the officer corps.

Arthur was eventually posted back to UK but not before other far eastern postings and, as a small boy Martin rode across China by train (a trip I experienced for myself in 2008).

The family home in the UK was 54 Goddington Road, Strood, Kent (in the Medway Towns); a large Victorian residence which overlooked a small park** and the River Medway, with a large garden that climbed the hill behind it.

*** During World War II, because it was on a hill high above the docks and riverside industries, the park was dug up and converted into a large reservoir to supply water for fire-fighting as the enemy regularly bombed the Medway towns (often with incendiaries).*

The attic space (previously servant's quarters) was converted into an exceeding well equipped play room (I speak from personal experience as I used to visit Aunty as a small boy and inherited Martin's Hornby OO clockwork train set). The house was full of Chinoiserie

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and Japanese items and was a great source of entertainment for visitors as Aunty had a wealth of anecdotes to go with each piece.

Martin was close to his cousins on the Weekes side; Mollie, Margie (my mother), Mary and Gilly all of whom lived in, or near, the Medway towns). He also often visited his other relatives on the Thornhill side who lived in a wonderfully eccentrically rambling ancient timbered house at Beckley on the Kent and East Sussex border, north west of the *Antient* (*ancient*) Town of Rye (part of the Cinque Ports and two Antient Towns confederation which actually pre-dates its Royal Charter of 1155 by a considerable period***). The house had its own well for drinking water from a well (no mains supply here) and the sanitary arrangements would not have been out of place in the dark ages – definitely not for the feint-hearted. It is not recorded what Martin thought of the house, but I loved it and I like to imagine he did too.

****In my dim and distant youth, I used to attend (in wig, tricorne hat and gown complete with a medieval mace – a weapon of war rather than the decorative ceremonial variety to be found elsewhere) meetings the governing body which rejoices under the name of the Courts of Brotherhood (formerly Brodhull) and Guestling after the two settlements at which early gatherings were held).*

Martin, like most of his Uncles on the Weekes side, was educated at the Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School, Rochester; (The Math) in the Medway Towns just across the River Medway from Strood. Martin is remembered on the School War Memorial.

The family also had close ties with both the nearby Cathedral and Cathedral School and a former pupil, one of Martin's second cousins; Bishop Ambrose Weekes was Chaplain of The Fleet (The Royal Navy) 1969-72 and the first Anglican Suffragan Bishop in Europe. Ambrose lived (for a while) in one of houses in the Cathedral Close which has always (since Victorian times) been known, to our family, as Grandma Castle's House due to the residency of yet another relative.

On leaving school Martin was encouraged, by his Father, to join the Westminster Bank (now named the National Westminster Bank) in Strood – a job he absolutely detested and so the opportunity to join the RAF was seized with alacrity – I am informed that there is a memorial to Martin in the branch.

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WW2

Martin joined the Royal Airforce Volunteer Reserve as an AC2 - Aircraftman Second Class; the lowest rank in the RAF (also known somewhat unkindly as *AC Plonk*).



Here is a picture of him in the garden of the family home in Strood proudly wearing his AC2 uniform.

He then trained as a WOP/AG (Wireless Operator/Air gunner) and was subsequently promoted to the rank of Flight Sergeant.

Martin was posted to No. 405 (Vancouver) Squadron Royal Canadian Airforce which operated, from various airfields in eastern England, with a variety of bomber types eventually settling on Avro Lancasters Mk IIIs where he became a member of the flight crew of ND352.

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Photo courtesy RCAF Bomber Command Museum, Nanton, Alberta, Canada

As you can see from the Squadron uniform patch 405 was a Pathfinder squadron whose task it was to locate and mark targets with flares, which the main bomber force could then aim at, thereby increasing the accuracy of their bombing.

By some quirk of fate Martin's father's family was connected to a company that had its head office in Toronto Road, near its junction with Canadian Avenue in the Medway towns.

The Crew of ND352



Martin is on the far left of this picture.

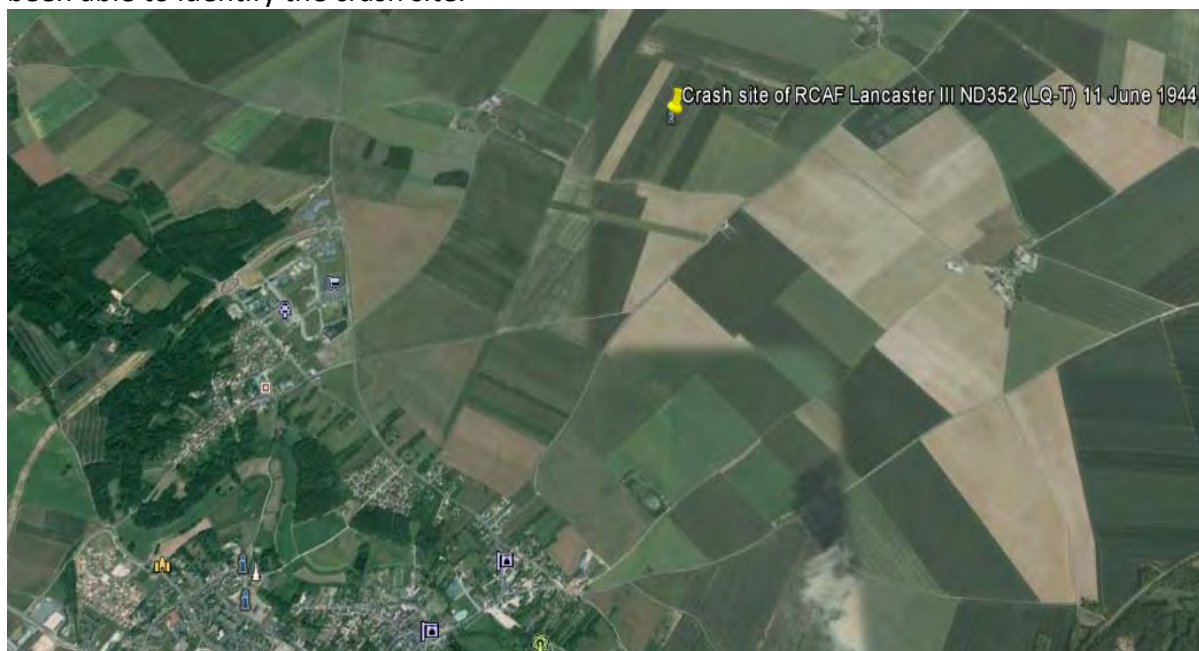
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Out of superstition the family had always resisted making arrangements in advance of a mission to do anything after its completion. However prior to the fateful final sortie they had booked tickets to go to the Ballet the following weekend.



On 11th June 1944, Martin was reported missing in action over France and the above photo of the crash site was taken by a small group of members of the French Underground; after they had covered the bodies with a piece of parachute silk and placed some flowers and a Cross of Lorraine (if caught they could have been shot for this simple act).

With the assistance of Gordon Stronach (the son of the Pilot – who incidentally is also a pilot) of Calgary, Alberta, Canada and the Secretariat of the Parish Church in Auneau I have been able to identify the crash site.



Map courtesy of Google Earth

When the news reached Uncle Arthur he went into decline, blaming himself for not only Martin's death but also the deaths of other members of the crew.

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In memory of Martin; his parents presented a matching set of silver Altar Cross and candlesticks (below) to their local Anglican (Episcopal) Church in Strood.



Photos courtesy of the Parish of St. Andrew's, Adforton, Herefordshire.

However in the latter part of the 20th century the Church was closed to worship and the Silver relocated (with our family's consent) to St. Andrew's Church, Adforton, Herefordshire; in the Parish of Wigmore Abbey (midway between Shrewsbury and Hereford).



Built as a Chapel of Ease to Leintwardine parish in 1875; St. Andrews is simple and small, with a wagon roof (which is currently the subject of major renovations).

An oasis of calm it doubles up as the village community centre and, due to its excellent acoustic properties is used as the venue for 'Arts Alive' performances, pantomimes, and other events.

Aunty lived on for many years after Uncle's untimely death and made all of her nieces and nephews (me among them) ever welcome in the family home. Subsequently, thirty years later, Aunty died within minutes of her elder brother Frank (my Grandfather) who was in another hospital some 40 miles distant.

Martin's cousins; Mollie, Margie and Gilly all visited his grave in Auneau, Eure et Loire, at various times and, on their first visit, Margie and Gilly had great difficulty in finding the

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grave until they bumped into the man responsible for the upkeep of the cemetery. He immediately led to the very spot where they were delighted to find that not only was the grave well maintained but fresh flowers were in evidence (placed there by the locals). Photos taken on other occasions also show the presence of newly placed flowers; put there by the good people of Auneau.



There were some freshly placed there on my visit in November 2013 (unfortunately the weather conditions had caused condensation on the local tribute).

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Also during my visit to Auneau in November 2013 I was given the contact details of the only member of the local Maquis was still alive. M. Gaetan Brice (the very same M. Brice in the photo of the wreckage) at 90 years young is still very alert and has an incredible memory.

Through the good offices of Christiane Lucas (a dear friend of cousin Gilly) who hails from Normandy but having married an Englishman and lived in Kent (for more years than I will reveal) considers herself both English and Norman (an excellent mix), his memories are being committed to paper for the first time (it is the intention to publish them in both English and French on the internet).



Photo by Isabelle Perrot

They went with songs to the battle, they were young.
Straight of limb, true of eyes, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted,
They fell with their faces to the foe.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
We will remember them.

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;
They sit no more at familiar tables of home;
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time;
They sleep beyond England's foam

Laurence Binyon (first published September 1914)

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Royal Canadian Airforce 405 (Vancouver) Squadron – Pathfinder. Lancaster III ND352 (LQ-T)



An eagle's head erased, facing to the sinister and holding in the beak a sprig of maple. The eagle's head, facing to the right to suggest leadership, is derived from the Pathfinder badge.

Motto: IDUCIMUS - "We Lead"

The motto depicts this was the first RCAF bomber squadron formed overseas and the only RCAF Pathfinder Squadron. No. 405 Squadron was formed at Great Driffield, Yorkshire, on April 23, 1941, and flew the RCAF's first bombing operation ten weeks later on June 12th and 13th. It flew Wellingtons until April 1942, and then converted to Halifaxes, becoming operational with the latter in time to take part in the historic 1,000-bomber raid on Cologne.

Late in October 1942, the squadron was loaned to RAF Coastal Command to strengthen our air defence of the Bay of Biscay at the time of the North African landings. Returning to Bomber Command at the beginning of March, 1943, No. 405 flew with No. 6 (RCAF) Group a few weeks before being selected for No. 8 (Pathfinder) Group with which it served until the end of the war.

Through the last 20 months of the bomber offensive the squadron was equipped with Lancasters (mainly Lancaster Mk. IIIs) but it later became the first unit to operate a Canadian-built Lancaster (using Rolls-Royce Merlins built under licence by Packard). This was KB700 (named The Ruhr Express), the first production Mk. X.

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I do not have a full frame photo of the particular craft about which I am writing - Lancaster III ND352 (LQ-T) - so here is a picture of another RCAF Lancaster III. which I found at: www.cmhg.gc.ca



For the later stages of WW2 the Squadron was based at the former RAF Gransden Lodge, Longstowe Rd, Little Gransden, Bedfordshire, UK.



Today it is a privately owned and operated airfield devoted to gliding and light aircraft.

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Lancaster III ND352 (LQ-T) was shot down by the enemy, over Auneau, Eure-et-Loir, France (about 15 miles from Chartres) in the early hours of 11th June 1944 returning from a post D-Day raid on the enemy's railway yards near Versailles, France.

There is a Luftwaffe record which claims the downing was as a result of the action of one of their night fighters piloted by Paul Zorner who is also credited with downing 3 other Lancasters on the same night. Former aircrew and relatives who have spoken with him describe him as a true gentleman.



The Crew of ND352:



Martin
Thornhill

Alexander
Armstrong

Paul
Gingras

Melvin
Stronach

Ross
Philips

John
Emery

Jack
Sharples

I have the original of this photo where no copyright is claimed but, unfortunately, no names were put to faces. However thanks to the tireless work of Jack Sharples' sister Gwen Verity and her husband John (recently passed on to me by her daughter Ann Clark) I have been able to fill in that gap.

The crew was a multidiscipline one so, at first, I could not say, with any certainty, which individual (other than the Pilot – Flt Lieutenant Melvin Stronach and Flight Sergeant Paul Gingras) was in which seat during the fateful mission but my family believed Martin was in the tail gunner position. However Paul Gingras's report (later in this narrative) records Martin was in the radio operator's seat. Once again the work by Gwen and John Verity who met with Melvin Stronach during her aforementioned research has lifted the veil.

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a) Survivors

Pilot: Flight Lieutenant Melvin P Stronach, Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) from Calgary, Alberta, Canada. – Seriously injured (burns), captured and hospitalised by the Luftwaffe (who, apparently, never reported his existence to the Nazi authorities – this had a good side and a downside. The good was that he was able to be given the best of treatment but the downside was British authorities was not advised and his family was told he was MIA.)

Apparently the local French Underground (Maquis) had actually found him but one of their members (a local doctor) was so concerned as to his injuries (they feared he would die without better medical care) and felt they had no choice but to hand him over to the local Luftwaffe squadron. With the benefit of hindsight that was a brilliant move as the Luftwaffe transferred him to a specialist hospital on the outskirts of Paris which saved his life and from whence he was liberated by the advancing Allied forces and repatriated to the UK. (We have a lovely letter from Melvin which I have reproduced in this document.)

Flight Sergeant Paul H Gingras, RCAF (born in Quebec but, on the outbreak of war, possibly resident in Regina, Saskatchewan) survived uninjured and, for a time, joined the French Underground (strictly against the rules but being bi-lingual in French and English he was able to avoid detection by the enemy patrols). Paul performed heroically (awarded the Croix de Guerre) but, eventually, his group joined up with the advancing Allied forces and he too was repatriated to the UK.

b) Those who did not make it home:

1) Buried in Auneau

Flying Officer Alexander T Armstrong, RCAF.

Pilot Officer Joseph J G Dagenais, RCAF

Flying Officer John (Jack) L Emery RCAF.

Flight Sergeant Martin A Thornhill, RAF.



Photo by Isabelle Perrot

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It being the only Commonwealth war grave in Auneau cemetery the locals care for it and regularly place flowers there. It is close by the village's own war memorial which records both villagers killed in combat and those sent off to Nazi camps from which they never returned.

2) No known grave – *"Known only to God"*

Sergeant Jack W Sharples, RAF died in the action and has no known grave but is remembered on the RAF memorial at Runnymede, near Windsor, UK.

Pilot Officer Ross J Philips, RCAF also died in the action and has no known grave but is also remembered on the RAF memorial at Runnymede, near Windsor, UK.



© Commonwealth War Graves Commission

The Air Forces Memorial at Runnymede commemorates, by name, over 20,000 airmen who were lost in the Second World War during operations from bases in the United Kingdom and North and Western Europe, who have no known grave.


They served in Bomber, Fighter, Coastal, Transport, Flying Training and Maintenance Commands, and came from all parts of the Commonwealth. Some were from countries in continental Europe (e.g. Denmark, France, Norway, Poland to name but four) which had been overrun but whose airmen continued the fight in the ranks of the Royal Air Force.

Runnymede is famed as being the location where, in 1215, King John signed the Magna Carta which is acknowledged across the Commonwealth and the United States of America as being the foundation stone of our legal systems, democracies and liberties.

It also the site of a memorial to the assassinated President John F Kennedy (JFK) which uniquely, at one and the same time, is both part of the United Kingdom and the United States.

"Let every Nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend or oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and success of liberty." JFK

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Sqn	Date	Task	Desig	Type	Comments						
405	10/06/1944	Versailles	ND352	Lancaster III	T/o 2326 Gransden Lodge to bomb rail facilities. Crashed at Auneau (Eure-et-Loir).						
	Rank	Init	Surname	Decoration	Unit	Age	Disposition	Service No.	Cemetery	CWRef	Deceased
	F/Lt	M P	Stronach			20		1865144	RUNNYMEDE MEMORIAL	1806564	11/06/1944
	Sgt.	J W	Sharples					J/21336	AUNEAU COMMUNAL CEMETERY	2321021	11/06/1944
	F/O	A T	Armstrong					J/87035	RUNNYMEDE MEMORIAL	1804321	11/06/1944
	P/O	R J	Phillips					J/22230	AUNEAU COMMUNAL CEMETERY	2321023	11/06/1944
	F/Sgt	M A	Thornhill			22		1333987	AUNEAU COMMUNAL CEMETERY	2321024	11/06/1944
	F/Sgt	P H	Gingras							-	
	P/O	J J G	Dagenais			20		J/87660	AUNEAU COMMUNAL CEMETERY	2321022	11/06/1944

Remember these boys in Bomber Command had an average age of 21 and were all volunteers – not conscripts - and, as was common practice at the time, ND352's crew was a mix of Canadians (both English and French speakers) and Brits. (For example my own dear Father-in-Law – a Brit – served in 455 Squadron Royal Australian Air Force Coastal Command which operated, for a time, from a neighbouring airfield to 405 in eastern England).

Paul Gingras's story

Paul (bilingual French & English) being the first to make it “home” to the UK wrote in his MI.9 report (DHH 79/507) lists the crew as F/L Stronach (pilot, evaded), F/O A.T. Armstrong (navigator, killed), Pilot Officer J.J. G. Dagenais (air gunner, killed), Flying Officer J.L. Emery (navigator/bomb aimer, killed), Pilot Officer R.J. Phillips (air bomber, killed), Flight Sergeant M.A. Thornhill (radio operator, killed), and Sergeant J.W. Sharples (killed).

“Aircraft ND352 (LQ-T) departed Gransden Lodge, 2300 hours on 10 June 1944 and came down a few kilometres northwest of Etampes. He reported that his parachute, harness and Mae West (a life-preserver for landings in water) had been left in a field, being finally given to French villagers. He did not know if secret papers and equipment had been destroyed, but saw aircraft burning in the air and saw it as a large fire on the ground. He was the mid-upper gunner. His report reads:

My aircraft was one of a squadron of Lancaster Pathfinders making an attack on a railway yard near Versailles (NWE Sheet 7- R.83). We were due to go in at Zero + 15 (0015 hours) and were on time. After dropping our load and reporting the fact to the Master Bomber we turned for home. I believe we bombed at 6,000 feet.

Somewhere between Stampes (Etampes, France Sheet 15 - W.89) about 0030 -0040 hours I heard explosions beneath me, saw the starboard engines on fire and received the “bale out” order over the intercom. I called back I was baling out. Although I saw no enemy aircraft, I believe we were shot down by one, because I had seen no flak at that time. It is probable that we were cannoned from below. My conviction is strengthened by the fact that an enemy fighter base is reported at or near Auneau (R.6003) not far from the scene of the attack.

I had difficulty in getting out of the turret, my mae west and clothes got caught up in the projections; eventually I landed in the aircraft head first.

The aircraft was burning fiercely from nose to rear, and flames were reaching out to the mid upper turret.

I baled out through the rear hatch and fell like a stone; I realized I was holding the parachute handles and NOT the ripcord. When I pulled the cord, I was knocked out for a short time, probably the parachute straps. However, I was conscious before reaching the ground which I did unhurt.

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I saw none of the crew and do not know if they had baled out - though am sure the W/T operator must have perished in the aircraft. The aircraft was in a glide and there was time to bale out.

Just before landing I saw another aircraft on fire - probably another Lancaster from our raiding party. It was flying in the same direction as ours and crashed in much the same place. I could see both aircraft burning.

I had landed in a field and left my parachute, etc. in a heap where I stood. Not far away was a village silhouetted and I made off in the opposite direction, mistaking trees for houses several times.

Eventually I reached a road and later a large house, knocked for about half an hour, and flashed my torch in the windows, but gained no response. Seeing the outline of a barn nearby I went in to it and climbed a ladder to the loft. Some six or seven men were sleeping here; someone woke up and I declared myself as an evader - not difficult to see, as I was in full flying kit. They said the house I had tried to get into was owned by a collaborator.

It was clear I was among friends and in due course one of them offered to guide me to a house about eight kilometres distant where I would receive help.

I was about 0330 hours when my guide and I set off. Before doing so we went over my escape maps, checked contents of my aid box - all of which I replaced - and substituted my flying boots for a pair of ill-fitting shoes which I was given. My flying kit I also left behind; I went off dressed in my battle dress and cap and carrying my pistol.

My guide had a bike, and because I was unable to walk very quickly - I was a bit dizzy from the blow I received in the air - we took it in turns to ride and walk. It was thought advisable to hide when anyone approached us, but we reached our destination without incident.

I was made welcome by my host, but when his wife came down, she showed signs of agitation on seeing me. When I offered to depart, however, she apologized for apparent lack of hospitality and would not let me go.

My host related what had occurred a few days previously. The household in company with every man, woman and child in the village, had been forced to witness the public execution of a family by the Germans with all their "terror" trimmings. The execution had been done by machine gun which had been turned threateningly on the crowd. The family concerned had given shelter to two Allied airmen, who had been captured after they had left the family. It was thought that the Germans traced the people because the airmen had revealed their name and address, or had written it down on papers obtained by the Germans when searched. It had been a terrible experience as all houses were carefully searched and people questioned.

I was given food and a bed; in the morning I received a farm labourer's suit and was loaned a bike. My guide of the previous night came along, and together with the help of some other men, organized a search for my crew and any from the other Lancaster I had seen to crash. Although searching from 0900 - 1700 hours we had no luck - except to recover my parachute, harness and Mae West, which I distributed to my helpers.

We returned to my host and I gave him back his bike. I was given food to eat and a supply to last me with care for a couple of days; in addition I obtained a map from an almanac. My guide gave me an old identity card and I substituted the photo on it for one of mine (full face). He was to accompany me to Auneau (NWE Sheet 7 - R.6003).

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I said goodbye to my friend at Auneau and continued walking until midnight - found a barn and went to sleep.

[12 June 1944] I decided to head northwest with the idea of hitting the beachhead somewhere between Caen - Dozule (Sheet 7F/2 - 2673). I thought it wise to avoid big towns and main roads, but rather to keep to secondary roads and cross country, using signposts and compasses of which I am thankful I had two - as I subsequently lost one.

It was not until I reached the outskirts of Haintenon (R.4617) that any incident occurred. I could hear shots and a man came running towards me saying, "They are taking the young men to the concentration camps." This caused me to make for a parkland, where I rested, washed and ate. In trying to get out, I wandered over dykes and found myself trapped within a circle of water. Some 50 or more civilians were working at erecting huts over ammunition dumps already in place. I decided to lie up until they knocked off for the day, and to follow them up and pass off as one of them. Things worked out well, and I was able to skirt the town and proceed on my way.

Puisseux (R.3225) was reached about curfew time (2300 hours) and I was making for what I took to be a convent when a German came out of the gate nearly colliding with me. He asked no questions however. When I looked into the gardens I saw many other Germans and realized I must risk the curfew and get on my way.

After walking for close on a couple of hours I found that I was back again in Puisseux. I set off again, and making for Treon (R.2929) I found a barn en route and slept for a bit. It was so cold however that I was soon on my way again and reached Treon about 0545 hours. I was weary and felt the need of help.

I received the name of a possible helper who lived in a nearby village - but saw some Gestapo at a road fork to that village and decided not to bother.

After a while I reached Aunay sur Crecy (R.2828) and chose a fairly poor but cleanly kept house to try my luck for help. After inquiring for a mythical person, I found the lady of the house friendly disposed and asked some questions about the invasion situation and also asked for help and food. It was clear she did not trust me altogether, but got some food together for me, without inviting me to eat it in her house.

Whilst I was eating what she had given me at the steps of a monument a little way down the village a man cycled along and spoke to me. He asked had I been to a certain house, and when I admitted it, sat down and had a long talk, indicating he had an idea what I was. He was very friendly, warned me against Gestapo activity in Crecy Couve (R.2628) and went off to get me some more food for my journey.

It must have been about 1000 hours, when I was still sitting in this village. I heard Fortresses coming over, and bombing the airfield just outside Treon. I saw no aircraft shot down nor heard any results of the raid.

I kept my general direction, slept outside Verneuil (R.0038) on the 14 June 1944, had a good clean up at a barbers in that town, and got the latest news. Avoiding any more towns I reached Notre Dame de Courson (Q.5472) on the night of the 15 June 1944 where I spent the night.

The following day, 16 June 1944, I set off again about 1300 hours, having slept late. I was weary and my feet were sore and shoes made them bleed. At a point west of Fervaques (Sheet 8F -5476) I met a French man who asked me whether I had seen any stray cattle. I hadn't, but asked him about the

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situation, where the British and Germans were, etc. He told me the British were in Dozule. He gave me details of where the Germans were in the vicinity and told me of three gun positions, one of which he specially recced for me there and then.

I took a path into the woods on the west side of the road and struck north again - this brought me out onto another road and as I emerged from the wood, three soldiers came towards me from my right, shouting and another man from a house on my left. I noticed there was a log barrier across the road. I continued walking towards the approaching sentries until one called out "Arretez, arretez". I stopped; meanwhile the man on my left had closed up to me; he was an officer. He could not speak French but one of his men could and acted as interpreter.

The officer asked me what I was doing out curfew and I explained I was on my way to my Mother, had been delayed, and just had to go on. I produced my identity card. The officer ran his hands over me and even dipped into my pockets - he missed my RAF torch in my trousers and aid box and purse in inside my shirt. He did however find a piece of "Perspex" which I had picked up from a shot down FW. He cried out "Tommy Tommy" and imitated the noise and flight of an airplane. I laughed and said, "Non, Allemand".

The officer seemed in good humour and without any suspicions as to who he was joking with. After a time he pointed up the road where the surface had changed from gravel to concrete, said, "Pas la" and, pointing down the road said "Allez", "Raus". I needed no second bidding.

After walking for about another hour, I turned into a barn and slept. Early that day I was about and making across country - from where I could hear gunfire - reached the outskirts of Dozule. Here on a hill overlooking the town a lad ran away when he saw me. I caught up with him and asked him for information about the lie of the land, and whether one could get through the line. He said, "Yes - if you knew how." Still talking he led me to the other side of the hill to get a better view of the town and sea, but was chased away with curses by a farmer working there.

When I spoke to the farmer and apologised for having brought the lad on his ground I declared myself. He invited me into his house - I was once again among friends. In due course the British took the South bank of the river at Caen and I was able to contact British Headquarters again on 18 July 1944."

Paul's modest account misses out much of his personal acts of bravery but, fortunately, the following was reported by French authorities when recommending him for honours:

"Paul Gingras, Canadian Air Gunner, voluntarily participated in the French Resistance Movement and displayed great bravery. By his courage, several important missions were successfully carried out behind enemy lines, notably the destruction during the night of the 2nd and 3rd of July 1944 of a bridge of the utmost strategical importance.

NOTE: This award generated some interesting correspondence about protocol (which seems to have been ignored) and common sense (which was applied). On 6 March 1945 Air Commodore E.E. Middleton (Acting AOC Commanding-in-Chief) wrote to the Under Secretary of State, Air Ministry, as follows:

The Canadian Ambassador in Paris, General Vanier, while in Caen recently, was presented with the enclosed citation, also the Croix de Guerre avec Etoile d'Argent and an F.F.I. emblem, by Commandant Gille, President of the Committee of Liberation of Calvados, for Pilot Officer Paul Henri Gingras. This award has evidently been made in the field to Pilot Officer Paul Henri Gingras J.87974 of the Royal Canadian Air Force.

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I do not think that this matter has been taken through the usual channels, probably due to the conditions prevailing at the time the Commandant made the award. However, I should appreciate your presenting this case to the appropriate authorities and advising them of my approval of its acceptance.

It is requested, also, that our appreciation of this award be extended to the French authorities.

On 12 June 1945 Mr. F.S. Yuill passed this on to Sir Robert Knox with his own comments:

You will see that the awards have been made in an unusual manner and were not offered through the appropriate channel in the normal way. In the circumstances I presume that we can only agree to the Canadian authorities\' request for the awards to be accepted on their behalf.

If the Committee concur, therefore, we will take steps to have the Croix de Guerre gazetted.

The F.F.I emblem is, of course, not a decoration and should the officer raise the question of wearing it in uniform I imagine it will be for the Canadians to make their own decision according to their regulations governing such cases."

I also found the following official RAF report on the mission:

"1. The Lancaster, which was detailed to act as a Visual Backer-up. Took off from Gransden Lodge at about 2245 hours. The outward flight was entirely without incident and the target was reached and bombed at zero + 15 from 3,000 feet. The target was covered with smoke and about 4/10 cloud but the Target Indicators were dropped in accordance with instructions received from the Master Bomber and the attack appeared to be successful. Light flak was fairly active in the target area but no trouble from it was experienced.

2. After leaving the target the Lancaster got clear of cloud and climbed steadily on a straight course to about 5-6,000 feet at a speed of 170-180 knots. There was no moon but clear starlight and the visibility was excellent. About 15 minutes from the target, while still climbing, the Lancaster was attacked without any warning by a night fighter. The Mid-Upper Gunner [Gingras] was keeping a look out astern at the time, and he could see that the Rear Gunner was also doing so. Both Gunners were traversing their turrets continually so as to keep a watch on both sides. The informant is therefore confident that the attack must have come from underneath although he has no direct evidence that this was so. The Lancaster carried Visual Monica, but the Wireless Operator did not report any indication before the attack. The instrument had certainly been functioning satisfactorily on the outward flight.

3. The first warning the informant received of the attack was the sound of bullets hitting the aircraft. Immediately afterwards a large fire broke out in the starboard wing. This was fiercest immediately behind the inboard engine but spread along the wing to the outboard engine. At the time he got the impression that both engines were on fire, but in retrospect he inclines to the opinion that the fire originated in the wing, probably a tank, because the Lancaster continued to fly perfectly straight in a shallow glide as long as he remained in her. The port wing did not appear to have been hit at all.

4. The pilot now gave the order to abandon the aircraft, which Sergeant Gingras at once acknowledged. He was the first member of the crew to do so. He emphasizes that the attack, the fire and the Captain's order followed one another in extremely rapid succession occupying only a few seconds.

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5. Sergeant Gingras immediately removed his helmet and disconnected his intercom and oxygen supply. He experienced some difficulty in leaving his turret and it seemed some time before he eventually did so, head first. When he reached the fuselage he could see a huge blinding flame forward which appeared to fill the whole fuselage and stretch back almost as far as his turret. He picked up his parachute and moved aft to the rear exit, clipping on the parachute as he went along. The left hand side fastened easily, but the right hand clip would not go on at first. He opened the door and immediately saw large tongues of flame and smoke streaming past the aperture from the trailing edge of the wing. He then managed to get the right clip of the parachute fastened and left at once, head first. He saw no sight of the Rear Gunner before he left, but he was so blinded by the flames that it was difficult to distinguish anything.

6. Sergeant Gingras pulled at the carrying handle of the parachute for a few seconds before he realised his mistake and pulled the ripcord. When the 'chute opened he lost consciousness for a short space but came to while still in the air. He must have jumped from about 5-6,000 feet. He did not see the ground at all before he hit but landed comfortably on very soft ground in a barley field in the neighbourhood of Etamples.

7. After landing he saw a big fire on the ground a few miles off which he believes to have been his aircraft and less than ten minutes after he landed he saw another aircraft shot down in flames. He saw or heard nothing of any other member of his crew but he is of the opinion that there was ample time for the majority of them to bale out before he left, especially in view of the fact that the Lancaster never performed any unusual manoeuvres after being hit."

Bomber Command personnel.

A vast number of airmen from Australia, Canada, New Zealand and other parts of the British Empire and its Dominions served in the RAF, RCAF, RAAF, or RNZAF. Even before the USA's involvement after Pearl Harbour (7-Dec-1941) many United States nationals also swelled the ranks, usually by the simple expedient of crossing into Canada and joining the RCAF. Provided that the man concerned forsook his US citizenship, and took allegiance to the Crown, this practice was winked at by the authorities.

After the Japanese attack on the Americans at Pearl Harbour, and once the United States 8th Army Air Force (8AAF) arrived in Britain and began to operate against the enemy, many former US nationals were wooed back into the Army Air Force olive green uniform, tripling their rate of pay.

The 8AAF needed experienced fliers, and made the unusual concession of both (a) allowing those men who chose to finish their tour of duty with the RAF to do so, and (b) continuing to wear RAF brevets and decorations, provided that such were worn physically *lower than* any USA insignia.

Many French, Poles and Czechs joined the RAF and similar bomber units of the RCAF / RAAF / RNZAF. The Free French Air Force had Nos. 346 and 347 Sqdns and the Poles operated with great determination in such Squadrons as 300, 301 and 302. Many Poles and Czechs also flew on "Special Duties" flights, dropping arms and agents into occupied territory.

A typical Bomber Command crew could readily consist of a spectrum of nationalities; an Australian pilot, English bomb aimer, and flight engineer, Canadian gunners and New Zealander wireless operator.

A Tour of Duty

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Once on an operational Squadron, a tour of duty was 40 completed operations. An "op" was a successfully completed flight or sortie, where the primary or secondary target had been attacked. Crews turning back early through technical problems did not count as having successfully operated.

The loss rate was around the 4 to 5 per cent mark, so mathematically it was impossible to survive. Yet about 35 per cent of crews survived a first tour, after which they were classed as "tour expired" or "screened", then usually trained as instructors and sent to HCUs (Heavy Conversion Units) and OTUs (Operational Training Units) to train more crews.

After a six month rest, they came back for another tour of 20 operations. If they survived this, they could volunteer for more but if they chose not to they remained as instructors unless promoted to higher things.

During the first five operations a new crew was ten times more likely to not return from an operation due to lack of experience. Once a crew survived 20 ops, the odds were thought to be about even.

I have every reason to believe (from reading Martin's Flight Log) ND352 (LQ-T)'s final flight was the crew's 40th op; how cruel can fate be?

The bomber offensive progressed at such a rate that any period of time away from operations could leave aircrew thoroughly out of date with their knowledge and techniques. A return to operations after a six month break was traumatic, and a great number of crews were lost at the beginning of a second tour. Still, most aircrew found the dull and repetitive life of flying at training units so boring after squadron life that that they usually pulled whatever strings they could to return to operations.

Many of the men, doing a second tour with a different crew than their first, would find that they had finished a tour before the rest of the crew. Such was the comradeship of these crews that most would volunteer to do a few extra so that the crew's unity was preserved. There were many cases of a man doing one extra operation as a favour to their crew, or a tour-expired crew stepping in to make up the numbers, and then failing to return.

Bomber crews had a ten per cent chance of being able to bale out after being shot down. The German anti-aircraft system was extremely well organized. The Luftwaffe's night fighter force was also very highly developed, with ground radar stations directing airborne radar-equipped night fighters into the bomber stream. High-flying Luftwaffe aircraft also dropped flares to mark the bomber stream's progress.

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Inside a Lancaster

The following eight photos were all taken by me inside Lancaster B VII NX611 "Just Jane" which is owned by a private museum (open to the public) at the former RAF East Kirkby in Lincolnshire, UK.



Tail gunner's view. Photo © Jeremy Halliday



View forward from near Tail Gunner's seat. Photo © Jeremy Halliday. The light from above is from the mid upper gun turret (as would have been Paul Gingras position).

In Memorium



The Pilot's position. Photo © Jeremy Halliday



Life raft. Photo © Jeremy Halliday

In Memoriam



Part of the Radar (ASV). Photo © Jeremy Halliday



Type R115 radio. Photo © Jeremy Halliday

In Memorium



Flight Engineer's console. Photo © Jeremy Halliday



Navigator's aid. -Photo © Jeremy Halliday

In Memorium

(Should anybody wish to reproduce any or all of the above photos then a simple acknowledgement of my Copywrite for any non-commercial use will be quite acceptable to me. I will be entirely happy for them to used in free resources in any media, including the internet, and not least by any family or friends of the crew and Pierre Vandervelden, Isabelle Perrot and Dan Carville).

I am most grateful to the many (not least, in no particular order, Dave Birrell of the RCAF Bomber Command Museum of Nanton, Alberta, Canada, Pierre Vandervelden, Isabelle Perrot and Dan Carville) who created various websites from Belgium to Canada which have enabled me to compile this memorial to just one crew and, in so doing, fill in gaps in my family's knowledge of my cousin Martin Arthur Thornhill (died 11th June 1944 age 22).

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
We will remember them.
Laurence Binyon

Jeremy Halliday

Cheshire,
UK.
2013.

Appendices:

- i) The telegram.
- ii) The Commanding Officer's letter.
- iii) The Air Ministry's first letter.
- iv) Advice to Relatives.
- v) The Air Ministry's letter re Flt. Lieutenant Melvin Stronach's report.
- vi) Flight Lieutenant Melvin Stronach's letter.
- vii) His Majesty King George's letter.

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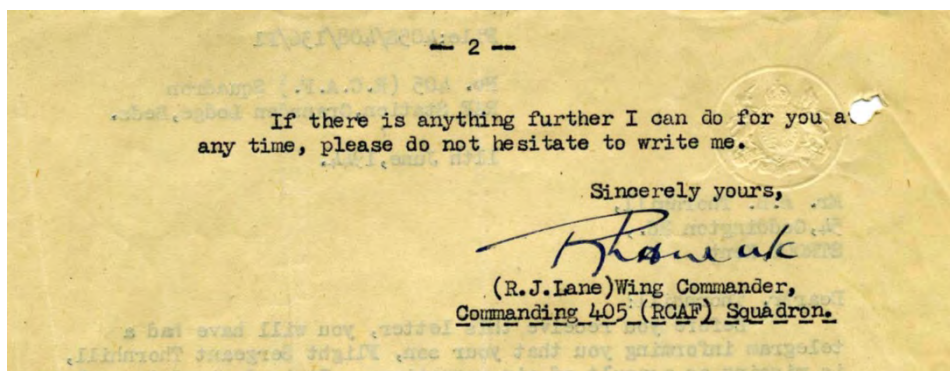
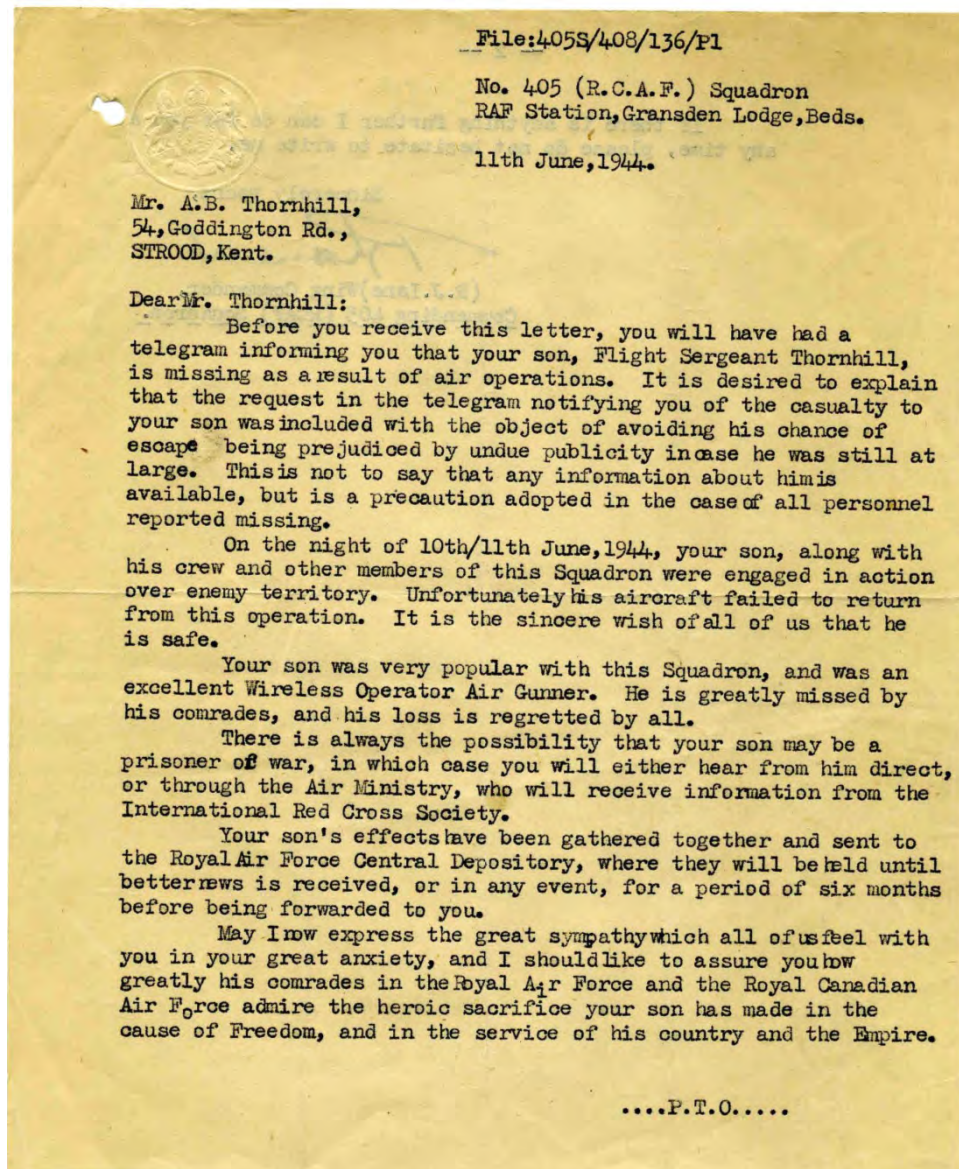
The Telegram – similar ones were sent to the next of kin all those reported missing in action (MIA).

No.		POST OFFICE		Sent	
Office Stamp		TELEGRAM		At	
Originating Subr.		For free repetition of doubtful words telephone "Telegram Enquiry" or call with this form at office of delivery. Other enquiries should be accompanied by this form and, if possible, the envelope.		To	
IT		Charges to pay		By	
<p>PRIORITY-00 MR A B THORNHILL 54 GODDINGTON ROAD</p> <p>STROOD-KENT =</p> <p>REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON P/SGT THORNHILL</p> <p>A M IS MISSING AS A RESULT OF AIR OPERATIONS 10/11</p> <p>JUNE 1944 STOP PENDING WRITTEN NOTIFICATION FROM AIR</p>					
Prefix	IF CODE	Handed in	Office of Origin and Service Instructions or Nature of Service (fuller than telegram)	Words	Received
		12.40	BF/T OHMS	62	From ATW BR 1.55
			CHARGES on Imperial and Foreign Telegrams and Radiotelegrams.	L s d.	By
G. & S. P. O. & Co. Ltd. 329					

No.		POST OFFICE		Sent	
Office Stamp		TELEGRAM		At	
Originating Subr.		For free repetition of doubtful words telephone "Telegram Enquiry" or call with this form at office of delivery. Other enquiries should be accompanied by this form and, if possible, the envelope.		To	
		Charges to pay		By	
<p>MINISTRY NO INFORMATION SHOULD BE GIVEN THROUGH THE PRESS</p> <p>STOP ANY FURTHER NEWS WILL BE COMMUNICATED TO YOU</p> <p>IMMEDIATELY LETTER FOLLOWING = 00 405 SQDN ROAF</p>					
Prefix	IF CODE	Handed in	Office of Origin and Service Instructions or Nature of Service (fuller than telegram)	Words	Received
					From At By
			CHARGES on Imperial and Foreign Telegrams and Radiotelegrams.	L s d.	
G. & S. P. O. & Co. Ltd. 33					

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The Commanding Officer's letter



In Memorium

The Air Ministry's first letter

Telephone No.: GERRARD 9234
Cable Calls and } "AIR MINISTRY," LONDON
Telegraphic Address: }
P. 418451/1/P.4.A.2.B.

AIR MINISTRY,
(Casualty Branch),
73-77 OXFORD STREET,
LONDON, W.1

19 June, 1944.

Sir,

I am commanded by the Air Council to express to you their great regret on learning that your son, Flight Sergeant Martin Arthur Thornhill, Royal Air Force, is missing as the result of air operations on the night of 10th/11th June, 1944, when a Lancaster aircraft in which he was flying as wireless operator set out to bomb the marshalling yards at Versailles and failed to return.

This does not necessarily mean that he is killed or wounded, and if he is a prisoner of war he should be able to communicate with you in due course. Meanwhile enquiries are being made through the International Red Cross Committee, and as soon as any definite news is received you will be at once informed.

If any information regarding your son is received by you from any source you are requested to be kind enough to communicate it immediately to the Air Ministry.

/The

A.B. Thornhill, Esq.,
54, Goddington Road,
Strood,
Kent.

AIR MINISTRY,
(Casualty Branch),
73-77 OXFORD STREET,
LONDON, W.1

19 June, 1944.

The Air Council desire me to convey to you their sympathy in your present anxiety.

I am, Sir,
Your obedient Servant,
Charles Wears.



ADVICE TO THE RELATIVE OF A MAN WHO IS MISSING

In view of the official notification that your relative is missing, you will naturally wish to hear what is being done to trace him.

The Service Departments make every endeavour to discover the fate of missing men, and draw upon all likely sources of information about them.

A man who is missing after an engagement may possibly be a prisoner of war. Continuous efforts are made to speed up the machinery whereby the names and camp addresses of prisoners of war can reach this country. The official means is by lists of names prepared by the enemy Government. These lists take some time to compile, especially if there is a long journey from the place of capture to a prisoners of war camp. Consequently "capture cards" filled in by the prisoners themselves soon after capture and sent home to their relatives are often the first news received in this country that a man is a prisoner of war. That is why you are asked in the accompanying letter to forward at once any card or letter you may receive, if it is the first news you have had.

Even if no news is received that a missing man is a prisoner of war, endeavours to trace him do not cease. Enquiries are pursued not only among those

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Notes for the General Information and Guidance of the Next-of-Kin or other Relatives of Airmen reported Missing, Deceased, Prisoners of War or Interned.

(Where the words "Airman" or "Airmen" appear they are to be construed as including "Airwoman" and "Airwomen.")

PART I.—AIRMEN REPORTED MISSING

1. Private Effects under R.A.F. Control.—(i) The private effects under R.A.F. control of an airman reported missing whilst serving with a unit in the United Kingdom, in Iceland, or at Gibraltar, are forwarded to the Central Depository, Colnbrook, near Slough, Buckinghamshire, for retention in safe custody. This does not apply to bulky articles, such as motor cars, cycles or large wireless sets. These are retained in safe custody by the station. Any cash found amongst the effects is handed over to the Accountant Officer and brought to credit in the airman's non-effective account.

(ii) Those of an airman reported missing whilst serving with a unit outside the United Kingdom (except in Iceland or at Gibraltar) are retained in safe custody in the Command.

(iii) The private effects of airmen reported missing cannot normally be released unless and until death is officially presumed to have occurred, which will be done whenever absolutely conclusive evidence of death is received. In special circumstances, however, the Air Ministry may be prepared to consider application for the release of the personal effects of a missing airman, prior to death presumption, after a minimum period of two months from the date of the casualty. Any such applications should be addressed to Air Ministry (P.4.Kits), 73-77, Oxford Street, London, W.1. In all cases of early release of effects the person to whom such effects are released will be required to sign a form of undertaking indemnifying the Air Council from all future claims in respect of effects so released. When evidence of death is not received within six months of the date on which the airman was reported missing, action will be taken by the Air Ministry to presume death for official purposes. In some cases, especially overseas, circumstances may make the period longer than six months.

(iv) After death has been officially presumed the effects will be released on the instructions of the Air Ministry (Accounts 13), Whittington Road, Worcester, subject to it having been ascertained who is the person legally entitled to receive them.

(v) The foregoing applies only to effects under R.A.F. control. It will be appreciated that the R.A.F. cannot accept responsibility for articles left outside camp or quarters, e.g., at the houses of friends.

2. Family and Dependants' Allowances and Pay.—(i) Family and Dependants' allowances (together with qualifying and voluntary allotments) and voluntary allotments to persons within certain degrees of relationship, if in payment before the airman is reported missing, will continue to be paid, and pay credited to the airman's account, for four weeks after the date of the notification of the casualty, or until death is established or presumed, whichever is the earlier. In other cases, pay ceases when an airman is missing.

(ii) Thereafter, temporary allowances (wholly payable from public funds) will be issuable as follows:—

(a) *To families, dependants and other persons within certain degrees of relationship.*—For thirteen weeks at a rate equal either to family or dependants' allowance (including qualifying and voluntary allotment) or to the voluntary allotment whichever was previously in issue. Ante-natal and the normal allowance payable on the birth of a child may be issued where eligibility arises during the temporary allowance period. If at the end of thirteen weeks the airman is still missing the temporary allowance will continue for a further period of nine weeks unless in the meantime the death of the airman is established or presumed, in which case the allowance will cease as from the end of the payment week in which the relatives are so notified.

(b) *Other persons outside the degree of relationship referred to above.*—For four weeks at the rate of voluntary allotment previously in issue, or at a rate not exceeding the qualifying allotment appropriate to the airman's pay, whichever is the less.

(iii) If the airman returns or is reported to be a prisoner of war or interned in a neutral country, payment of the allowances and allotments which were in issue before he was reported missing are resumed, any accrued arrears at the same time being put into payment and the airman's pay is credited to his account.

(iv) If at the expiration of the period referred to in sub-paragraph (ii) (a) above it has not been established that the airman is alive, the payment of a temporary allowance may be followed by a payment equal to the rate of pension (if any) which would be payable if the airman died. Such payments will be authorised by the Air Ministry until death is established or presumed, when payment of pension becomes the responsibility of the Ministry of Pensions.

3. Rates of Pension.—The rates of pension on which the allowances referred to in paragraph 2 above are based, are as follows:—

(i) *Widows* :—

<i>Widow of</i>	<i>Higher rate weekly.</i>	<i>Lower rate weekly.</i>
Warrant Officer	38s. 0d.	28s. 4d.
Warrant Officer (2nd Class)	35s. 9d.	26s. 8d.
Flight Sergeant	33s. 6d.	25s. 0d.
Sergeant	31s. 3d.	23s. 4d.
Corporal	29s. 0d.	21s. 8d.
Leading Aircraftman and Aircraftman	26s. 8d.	20s. 0d.

The higher rate applies to a widow over 40 years of age and to a widow under that age if she has a child eligible for an allowance in her charge or is incapable of self-support by reason of physical or mental infirmity of a prolonged or permanent nature. The lower rate applies to a widow under 40 who is ineligible for the higher rate.

These rates do not normally apply where the wife is living apart from her husband for reasons other than his service in the Forces, but if she was supported by her husband a pension not exceeding 20s. 0d. a week may be granted.

In addition, a pensioned widow may be granted an allowance for each eligible child under the age of 16 (18 in the case of a Warrant Officer) maintained by her, at the following weekly rates:—

For the first child	9s. 6d.
For the second child	8s. 6d.
For each other child	7s. 6d.

A widow, with eligible children living with her, may be granted a supplement not exceeding 12s. a week if she pays a rent, including rates, of more than 8s. a week.

(ii) *Motherless children* weekly rate, 12s. 0d.

(iii) *Parents.*—A temporary allowance at pension rates is only admissible when the parents show that they are in pecuniary need arising from old age, or from infirmity, or other adverse condition not being merely of a temporary character.

Where pension is payable, the rate varies according to the circumstances of the case, being between 5s. and 15s. a week for one parent and 22s. 6d. a week for two parents. In exceptional cases it may be possible to increase these maxima by an amount not exceeding 7s. 6d. a week.

(iv) *Other Dependants.*—Dependants not within the above categories may be eligible for a grant up to 10s. a week (or 5s. for a juvenile), if in need and incapable of self-support.

4. **Early Submission of Claims.**—In order that claims to continue allowance at pension rate (referred to in para. 2 (iv) above) may be investigated in good time to enable the allowance (if admissible) to be paid without delay, it is important that claims should be lodged promptly.

In the case of wives of missing airmen, the appropriate forms will be despatched without application; in the case of parents and other persons within pensionable relationship of the airmen, the forms will be despatched upon request.

The address of the Department concerned is :—

The Director of Accounts,
Air Ministry (Accts., 7K.Cas.),
Whittington Road, Worcester.

PART II.—DECEASED AIRMEN

5. **Private Effects under R.A.F. Control.**—(i) The private effects under R.A.F. Control of deceased airmen are forwarded to the Central Depository, Colnbrook, Slough, Bucks, for safe custody until release. This applies wherever the casualty occurred, but is subject to the following special provisions :—

- (a) Bulky articles such as motor cars, cycles and large wireless sets are retained by the Station pending release.
- (b) In "missing" cases in Overseas Commands the effects are retained until death is presumed and are then sent to Colnbrook.
- (c) When the effects are overseas and the next-of-kin appear to be resident in a country more easily reached direct from the Command in which the casualty occurred, e.g. South Africa or Australia from Middle East, the effects are retained in the Command pending release.
- (d) Owing to war-time conditions the effects of a casualty overseas (other than articles of sentimental value) often have to be sold, the proceeds being credited to the airman's account and the next-of-kin being informed.

(ii) Effects held at Colnbrook and those retained at Home Stations or in Overseas Commands are released on the instructions of the Air Ministry (Accounts 13), Whittington Road, Worcester, when it has been ascertained who is legally entitled to receive them under a will or an intestacy. Nomination of a person as "next-of-kin" does not of itself give any right to them.

(iii) Inventories of the effects are supplied to the next-of-kin.

(iv) Any cash of the airman found among the effects is handed over to the Accountant Officer and credited to the airman's account.

(v) The foregoing applies only to effects *under R.A.F. Control*, there being no responsibility for or power to deal with effects or cash left outside the camp station or Air Ministry premises.

(vi) Reference should be made to para. 1 (iii) as to presumption-of-death action in the case of missing airmen, and the position of effects before death is presumed.

6. **Pay and Family and Dependants' Allowances, etc.**—(i) The issue of an airman's pay ceases at his death.

(ii) Temporary allowances are payable as shown in paras. 2 (ii) (a) and 2 (ii) (b) above, except that the period in para. 2 (ii) (a) will be limited to 13 weeks.

7. **Claims for Pensions.**—(i) In order that claims to pension may be investigated in good time to enable payment of pension (if admissible) to be made without delay on the expiry of the period of 13 weeks referred to in para. 2 (ii) (a) above, it is important that dependants who desire to lodge claims for pension on the ground that the airman's death was due to war service should do so as soon as possible, unless they have already made claims under para. 4.

(ii) Claims by airmen's widows should be submitted on Form M.P.B.502, and claims by guardians of airmen's motherless children on Form M.P.B. 4. Copies of these forms are attached for use where applicable, together with the envelope in which to forward the claim to the Ministry of Pensions. Other dependants who desire to ascertain whether they are eligible for pension from the Ministry of Pensions should apply to the Regional Office of that Ministry, the address of which can be ascertained at any post office. Delay will result where application is made otherwise than to the Regional Office.

(iii) If the decision of the Ministry of Pensions is not received four weeks before the end of the period during which the temporary allowance continues to be payable, the applicant should write to the Ministry of Pensions at the following address :—

Ministry of Pensions,
(Widows' and Dependants' Pensions Branch),
Norcross, Blackpool, Lancs.

PART III.—AIRMEN REPORTED PRISONERS OF WAR OR INTERNEED

8. Private Effects under R.A.F. Control.—(i) These are dealt with as in para. 1 (i) (ii) and (v) above.

(ii) They cannot be released without the authority of the airman. Such an authority need be of an informal character only, e.g., a letter from the airman to his next-of-kin or personal representative.

9. Family and Dependants' Allowances and Pay.—(i) See para. 2 (iii) above. Pay continues to be credited to the airman's account. Allotments from the airman's pay may be made or varied, and remittances may be made to Post Office Savings Bank or other bank, or nominee resident in the United Kingdom, in each case on receipt of a written request from the airman.

(ii) The airman's pay is subject to deductions for any pay issued by the captor Government or by the Air Attaché in the country of internment.

PART IV.—ENQUIRIES

10. Enquiries re Effects, Pay and Allowances.—Enquiries *re* effects, pay and allowances should be addressed as follows :—

(i) *Release of Effects*—

To :—The Under Secretary of State,
Air Ministry (Accounts 13),
Whittington Road, Worcester.

(ii) *Other matters regarding Effects*—

To :—The Officer in Charge,
Central Depository,
Royal Air Force,
Colnbrook, Slough, Bucks.

(iii) *Service Pay and Allowances*—

To :—The Under Secretary of State,
Air Ministry (Accounts 13),
Whittington Road, Worcester.

11. Enquiries re Airman Himself.—Any enquiries regarding the notification of the casualty or seeking further information regarding the airman should be addressed to :—

The Under Secretary of State,
Air Ministry (P.4.Cas.),
73-77, Oxford Street, London, W.1.

In this connection attention is invited to the fact that any further information received regarding an airman who has been reported a casualty is invariably passed on without delay to the next-of-kin and any other person who has been officially informed of the casualty.

In Memorium

The Air Ministry's letter re Flt. Lieutenant Stronach's report

GERRARD 9234

TELEPHONE :
Extn.....

Any communications on the subject of this letter should be addressed to :—

THE
UNDER SECRETARY
OF STATE

and the following number quoted :—

Your Ref. P.418451/1/P.4.Cas. B.3.B.

AIR MINISTRY
(Casualty Branch)
73-77 OXFORD STREET
W.1

17 April, 1945.

Sir,

I am directed to refer to your letter dated 25th March, 1945, regarding your son, No.1333987 Flight Sergeant Martin Arthur Thornhill, Royal Air Force, and to inform you that a report has been received from the captain of the aircraft, namely, Flight Lieutenant Stronach who is now known to be safe.

This report, which is of a very disturbing nature states that about five minutes after leaving the target, Flight Lieutenant Stronach saw two bombers go down in flames, each brought down by single bursts of firing, the origin of which could not be seen. He gave his crew instructions that he was altering course to starboard to avoid these bursts but unhappily the aircraft was hit almost immediately by shells or bullets. No anti-aircraft fire was observed and Flight Lieutenant Stronach considers it is highly probable that the Lancaster had been hit from below by an enemy aircraft, possibly with upward firing guns.

The shells entered through the navigator's position and large holes were made in the floor and the bomb bays. The blackout curtains and the sides of the fuselage caught fire immediately and the flight engineer (Sergeant J.W. Sharples) and your son were ordered to extinguish the fire. They pulled down the curtains and Flight Lieutenant Stronach was handing the flight engineer his extinguisher when he realised that the whole of the centre of the fuselage was on fire.

I am to extend to you the very deep sympathy of the Department for the loss of your son.

/He

A. B. Thornhill Esq,
54, Goddington Road,
Strood,
Kent.

For Director of Personal Services.

In Memorium

He immediately gave the order to bale out, receiving an acknowledgement from all the crew with the exception of the navigator (Flying Officer A.T. Armstrong) and your son (Flight Sergeant M.A. Thornhill). He called up again specifically naming these two members and he also used the warning light. Flight Lieutenant Stronach was certain by this time that the intercommunication had failed.

He saw the two air bombers namely Warrant Officer R.J. Phillips and Flying Officer Emery and the Flight engineer, Sergeant J.W. Sharples leave by the front hatch and he caught a glimpse of the navigator, Flying Officer A.T. Armstrong. Flight Lieutenant Stronach made repeated efforts to help the navigator but unhappily without success. He eventually baled out with great difficulty and suffered severe injury in the form of burns on his head, right arm and right leg.

A report has also been received in this Department forwarded by the American Military Authorities in France and emanating from a local civilian which states that three bodies which could not be identified were recovered from the aircraft and the helmet of Flying Officer Armstrong and identity disc of Flight Sergeant Dangenais were also found. The report also states that one member of the crew was captured and in view of the fact that it is known that Flight Lieutenant Stronach and Flight Sergeant Gingras ^{ARE SAFE} it would appear that the whole of the crew is accounted for. However as it is still not possible to identify the prisoner of war and the three members whose identity is unknown and who are reported to have lost their lives it is impossible for the Department to notify you at this stage of the true position.

An enquiry has however been instituted of the Royal Air Force Missing Research and Enquiry Service in France in an endeavour to obtain further information which may clarify the position and you may rest assured that you will be notified with the least possible delay as soon as a reply is received.

I am to extend to you the very deep sympathy of the Department in your grave anxiety.

I am, Sir,
Your obedient Servant,

J. H. Druce
for Director of Personal Services.

In Memorium

Flight Lieutenant's Melvin P Stronach's letter

Nov. 30 - 44.
Flt. Lt. M. P. Stronach
J 21384, R.C.A.F.,
England.

Dear Mr. Thornhill,

No doubt you have been expecting to hear from me for some while and I am very sorry that circumstances haven't permitted me to do so much sooner. I know how very anxious you must be.

As it was I couldn't do so until I could get to headquarters and because I was physically handicapped and could not write for some while. Then too, Paul Gingras our mid-upper gunner got back to this country ahead of me as you know and you'll realize how little I could know of things in the back of the aircraft other than their telling me they were leaving.

I don't know whether or not Paul has written you but I must say I expected to learn a lot from his account. But Paul had much difficulty in getting out of his turret and saw no one on his way out. It was a great disappointment altho' he may have seen no one because of them leaving before him.

You see I had at first expected most of the boys at least to have beaten me back, then that Paul had seen some of them on the ground. Unfortunately, neither hope came true.

As you likely know, we were hit with flak shortly after leaving the target.

In Memorium

2.

In a very few seconds I realized the situation was hopeless and ordered the crew to bail out. Headquarters will tell you Gingras has mentioned that the order couldn't have been given any quicker. To my knowledge they acted upon it immediately.

As pilot of the aircraft I remained at the controls until every one had time to get out but unfortunately I hadn't heard enough from two of the boys so before leaving myself, I had to try and see if possibly they were still in the aeroplane. It was in looking for them that I was injured and I didn't see any one, before eventually being forced out of the aircraft myself. I am sorry to say Mat was one of the two, and that I have no other news to give you about him. However from the facts we know, we feel quite sure he must have left before Gingras.

An aircraft travels quite a distance over the ground in but a few seconds and as I left some while after the others I didn't expect to see any on the ground. But I thought I might hear of them, and I only heard that there were other N.A.F. around. I couldn't get around very well and eventually had to be taken to hospital. Of course the hospitals were German controlled and I became a prisoner of war. But here in a point, I was never reported as such by the Germans to this country.

And believe me Mr. Thornhill, I have every confidence in Mat and still hold every hope

In Memorium

for him. We had ^{3.} flown together for a long while and we had worked so well together in action that I know he is very resourceful, cool and confident and that I could rely upon him in every emergency.

We had a very good crew Mr. Thornhill we had to have to do our particular line of work and I am very attached to all of them. It is a tremendous worry, particularly when you know they got out of the aeroplane and still to have heard nothing from or about them. I know what a terrible thing it is when you don't know.

I've wanted to meet you people ever since Mat crewed up with us and since coming back even more have I wanted to visit you personally. But there is so little time and I don't get around perhaps as well as I used to. However that will come, I apparently have to go in hospital again back in Canada but those days should pass very quickly.

However, I do hope this will help. Remember I have every hope. Be of good cheer, Mat will want you that way, pray God that he is alright and that He will watch over and protect him.

I do wish there could be more to tell you, I want to help so badly. Believe me, Mr. and Mrs. Thornhill, I feel in my heart very much for you. Yours sincerely,
Melvin Stronach.

In Memorium

My Canadian address
H. L. M. P. Stronach
1208-14th Ave., West,
Calgary, Alberta,
Canada.

In Memorium

His Majesty King George VI letter of condolence.



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

The Queen and I offer you
our heartfelt sympathy in your
great sorrow.

We pray that your country's
gratitude for a life so nobly
given in its service may bring
you some measure of consolation.

George R.I

A. B. Thornhill, Esq.

In Memorium

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

Rupert Brooke (1887-1915)