

THE STORY OF THE MEMORIAL
COMMEMORATING RHODESIAN AIR CREW
KILLED OVER FRANCE DURING WORLD WAR II

The late Bill Dives DFC provided the inspiration resulting in the creation of a memorial dedicated to Rhodesian Air Crew who gave their all over France. Following his passing in December 2003 his son Martin pursued this mission through to fruition. In this task the Aviation Association of Normandy, Association Normand du Souvenir Aérien - A.N.S.A. – played a prominent role, in which the names Jacques Paris and Michel Baudouin deserve special mention. Some years ago, after Bill had settled in a small village in Normandy, it became known that he was an ex-Lancaster Bomber Pilot and this attracted the attention of A.N.S.A. who made him an honorary member. Bill played a very active role in their continuous research of missing Allied Aircraft and Crews over the past five years.

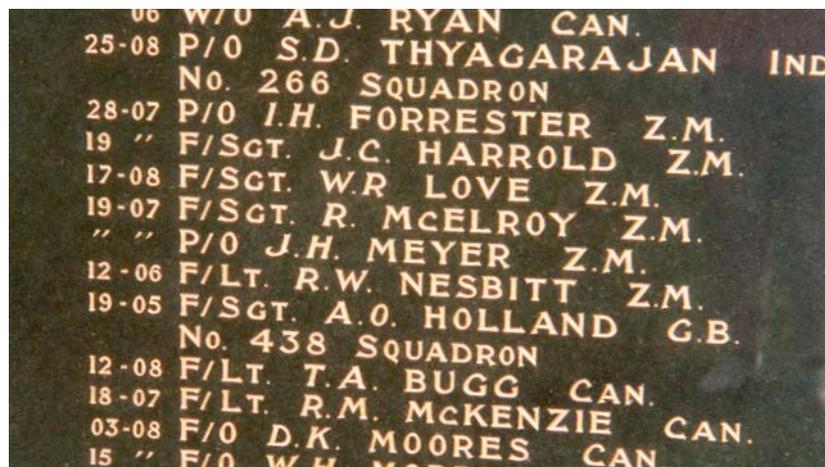
The story of the Memorial began early in 2001 when a member of A.N.S.A. informed Bill Dives that there was a highly decorated Rhodesian Pilot, Group Captain Charles Appleton, buried in the Military Cemetery at Caen, in Normandy. Norman Franks's book 'Fighter Command Losses in World War II refers to ['G/C C.H. Appleton CBE, DSO, DFC, CdG, Rhodesian Pilot, aged 38, only had one leg, buried in Banneville la Campagne War Cemetery'](#). At that time Beryl Salt's book 'A Pride of Eagles' had just been published, and to our surprise there was no mention of a Charles Appleton. This set in motion a detailed research into the life of Charles Appleton which lasted for two years, uncovering details of his time in the RAF, his family, and culminating in the discovery of his daughter Carol Hudson Davies living in England with her husband; but at the same time revealing that Charles Appleton was not a Rhodesian.

During this time Bill Dives was writing his book and I believe that his lifelong recall of friends in Bomber Command who 'failed to return' inspired the idea of a memorial dedicated to Rhodesian Air Crew. Initially his idea was to give pride of place to Group Captain Charles Appleton and to locate the memorial at the spot where his Typhoon crashed – which had been located by A.N.S.A. in Normandy, between Falaise and Argentan. When it transpired that he was not a Rhodesian, this idea was discarded and attention given to choosing another suitable location. A major concentration of Air Crew losses over France involved the Typhoon Squadrons in Normandy of whom 161 Pilots were killed in the three months period of the Normandy Campaign, from June to August 1944, in which 266 (Rhodesia) Squadron played a prominent role.

A magnificent memorial commemorating the 161 Typhoon Pilots who were killed during the Normandy Campaign is to be found at Noyers Bocage, to the west of Caen.



The names of all Pilots are listed, headed by 3 Wing Leaders – including Group Captain Appleton – followed by the names of the Pilots killed in each Squadron. Regretfully, by the time that we became aware of this Monument it was too late to do anything about changing the nationality of the 266 Squadron Pilots from ‘Z.M’. to ‘RHOD’.



Bill Dives concluded that the above names should be taken into account in deciding the location of the Rhodesian Memorial. He methodically checked each name with particular regard to living relatives and background stories. The name that came to the fore was F/Sgt. W.R. LOVE.

Royce Love is buried in the Church Yard in the village of Ste Marguerite des Loges in Normandy, aptly situated in the area of the final ‘Falaise Gap’ Battle, where the Canadians and Poles came to the fore and where Charles Green’s Typhoons pre-empted the threat of German Tiger Tanks. Royce Love was shot down by a FW190 on 17 August 1944 in the thick of the final battle to close the ‘Falaise Gap’, and encircle the German Army. Royce Love’s cousin, Owen Love, is buried in an adjoining grave. Owen was one of the Rhodesian Air Force Pilots assigned to the ferrying of new Spitfires from England to Rhodesia in 1951. By a cruel stroke of fate his aircraft

developed some failure while flying over France and crashed. Owen is buried alongside Royce, and there is a third grave, a New Zealand Mustang Pilot – F/O Tasker - shot down by a FW190 on 16 June 1944, crashing in close proximity to the Church Yard.

Arrangements then went ahead to get formal agreement for the Memorial to be located at Ste Marguerite des Loges. A.N.S.A. played a prominent role in this objective and most importantly secured the backing of General Joel Coignard, a highly decorated veteran of the Algerian War, and one of the elder statesmen of Ste Marguerite des Loges. He together with the Mayor of the Village Patrice Bellais, and A.N.S.A. set about making the formal arrangements for the ceremony. It was agreed that the ceremony should also include the commemoration of historic events which befell the village during the Normandy Campaign. From the Rhodesian aspect the immediate priority was the Memorial itself.

Bill Dives expressed the wish that the Memorial should comprise written details inscribed on a Plaque made from Rhodesian Black Granite. David Barbour, an ex Rhodesian Air Force Pilot living in Harare, Zimbabwe, very generously undertook responsibility for this task. Initially it was intended that the names of the Rhodesian Air Crew be inscribed on this plaque, but because of uncertainty and the deadline date set to deliver the Plaque to France, it was decided to confine the inscription to the following:



Rhodesian Air Force Badge
EN SOUVENIR DES AVIATEURS
RHODESIENS MORTI AU
CHAMPS D'HONNEUR DURAND
LA SECONDE GUERRE
MONDIALE
---- IN MEMORIAM ----
IN MEMORY OF THE RHODESIAN
AIRMEN KILLED IN ACTION
IN FRANCE DURING WORLD WAR II
---- LEST WE FORGET ----

While all these on-going arrangements were underway Bill Dives was admitted to Hospital suffering from terminal cancer. His family came to France to be with him during his last days, and he passed away peacefully in the early hours of Monday 1st December 2003 in the presence of his son Martin, who in his message informing close friends of the sad news expressed the following wish: **‘It will be an honour for me to do what I can to help you all realise the vision of a Rhodesian Airmen's Memorial’**. So it came about that Martin took over the reigns to coordinate and bring about the successful realisation of the Memorial at Ste Marguerite des Loges, in close collaboration with General Coignard and A.N.S.A.

The consignment of the Granite Plaque to France turned into quite a saga. It was crated by Bill Sykes in Harare together with a Metal Plaque commemorating Caesar Hull, which had been “stolen” from the Memorial near Shangani. The crate was cleared through Zimbabwe Customs through a stroke of luck, and delivered to Harare Airport, from where it was air-freighted free of charge by MK Airline to Manston in Kent. It was then delivered to Tangmere Museum, where the Caesar Hull Plaque was removed. The Granite Plaque was re-packed in the same crate and handed to Martin Dives who arranged delivery to Jacques Paris in France. The Plaque was fixed in the Churchyard Wall adjacent to the Main Entrance Gate and facing onto the main street - an ideal position for all passers-by to see and digest - and in close proximity to the graves of Royce and Owen Love.

It was decided that the Ceremony be held on Saturday 26th June, beginning at 11.00 am and divided into three phases:

1. The commemoration of the bombing of Ste Marguerite des Loges.
2. Remembrance of a young ‘Resistant’ killed on 21st August 1944 in the confines of the village.
3. The unveiling of the Plaque commemorating Rhodesian Airmen.

General Coignard very ably stage-managed the whole ceremony. The reception accorded to us by the people of Ste Marguerite des Loges was very warm and appreciative, in a typically modest and dignified Normandy way. The bulk of the village population turned out – approximately 80 people, including flag bearers, a bugler and drummer.

Dignitaries included Dr C. Leteutre - the ‘Deputy’ of the area/ Mayor of Falaise, and Patrice Bellais - the Mayor of Ste Marguerite des Loges, plus other prominent persons and two Regional Newspaper Journalists. A.N.S.A. were represented by Jacques Paris, Michel Baudouin, Georges Nao and a flag bearer. Georges Nao was dressed in full French Air Force Uniform with Pilot’s Wings earned in Canada, and at the end of the ceremony he laid a wreath at the foot of the Plaque, on behalf of A.N.S.A.

Present from the Rhodesian side were:

John Love and wife Carol : John is Royce Loves’ brother and this was the third time he had visited the graves. When Royce was killed John was with the 6th South African Armoured Division in Italy, advancing towards Florence. John is best known back home as a Racing Driver, and during this visit was royally entertained by Formula 1 members at Silverstone.

John Love at Graveside



John and Marguerite Kennedy: ex Sipolilo, close friends of Bill Dives and Martin, who run a self catering setup in the area.

Bruce Wallace: took part in the first post war course to attend the RAF School of Technical Training at Halton in December 1951. Then joined the BSAP, but eventually settled in the UK. Married Sally in Jersey in 1966. A very keen biker, and for the trip to France joined up with a Texan friend travelling on two top of the range BMWs.

Other friends and acquaintances had heard about the service and joined in, including Keith and Anne Hawthorn who as ex Rhodies have been living Normandy for many years, who with thanks provided two of the photos. They were informed about the ceremony by their cousin Brian McKelvin, an ex Ops Officer during the bush war.

In the first part of the service, with everyone gathered in front of a very imposing War Memorial, a commemoration service was held in memory of the ten members of the family in a nearby farm house who were killed by bombs dropped accidentally by an American Aircraft on 25 June 1944. This was followed by a service of dedication in honour of a 16 year old Resistance Fighter, Gilbert Lecor, who was shot by the Germans in August 1944 whilst helping the Canadian Forces to clear out pockets of German rear guard fighters left behind in the retreat through the Falaise Gap.

The party then moved down the street to the Church Yard, facing the main entrance gate, for the unveiling of the Memorial Plaque, which had been covered by a Union Jack. Flanked by Martin Dives, General Coignard and the Mayor of Ste Marguerite des Loges on one side and the Flag Bearer on the other, the ceremony began with Martin giving a speech in French and English paying tribute to the Rhodesian Airmen who lost their lives over France in World War II. (Copy attached at the end of this write-up.) This was followed by an address by the Mayor, Patrice Bellais, and translated by General Coignard, who expounded on the sacrifices made by Rhodesian Airmen and the resulting feeling of gratitude on the part of the local population.



L>R Martin Dives, General Coignard, The Mayor - Patrice Bellais

The Mayor performed the unveiling ritual, involving the French bugle call ‘aux morts’, a Minute of Silence, and a CD rendering of God Save The Queen and La Marseillaise.

A.N.S.A. Wreath-Laying



L>R Bill Musgrave, Jacques Paris, Georges Nao

To close off the ceremony all participants gathered at a nearby parish facility to partake of a drink in typical Normandy tradition.

After the service several people came up to Martin to add their comments. The Mayor expressed his wish to get possession of the list of the Rhodesian Airmen killed, so that he this could be appropriately displayed in the village. The sister of the Resistance Fighter, Gilbert Lecor, expressed her deep appreciation, which was very moving. Her granddaughter (aged about 22) was there in full naval uniform and added her thanks. Christine Coignard (aged about 35), the daughter of General Coignard, who had grown up in the village, said she had no idea of the extent of the contribution of the Rhodesians, and that it was important that the story be known. The Deputy for the area Dr C. Leteutre - who is also the Mayor of Falaise, expressed his appreciation and support.

Martin informs that there will be an annual commemoration service around this date which he will attend in the years to come. It is hoped that the list of the Rhodesian Airmen who lost their lives over French soil can be finalised so that it can be displayed next year. Finally, Martin wishes to extend his best wishes and thanks to all in helping to realise his father's dream.

MARTIN DIVES ADDRESS

TRIBUTE TO THE RHODESIAN AIRMEN WHO LOST THEIR LIVES OVER FRANCE IN WWII

**Given at Sainte Marguerite des Loges, Calvados, Normandy France on Saturday
26 June 2004**

I was born in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, which is today Harare Zimbabwe. I am the elder son of William Dives, DFC, who was born in Kwe Kwe Southern Rhodesia. He was the pilot of an RAF Lancaster bomber in 1944-45.

Today's service is the realisation of a dream for him.

During the last 10 years of his life he became very close to the people of Normandy, connecting with his ancient roots. Indeed the name Dives originates some 1 000 years ago from the river which flows between here and Falaise. He died in December last year and is buried in the village of La Sauvagère.

So it is the responsibility now of my generation to observe the 'duty of memory'.

On behalf of my father and all those whom I represent with great humility today, I thank you Monsieur Le Maire Patrice Bellais, together with the people of Ste Marguerite des Loges and Général Coignard for your hospitality in permitting this plaque to be placed in your village to honour the Rhodesian Airmen who lost their lives over France during WWII.

I thank you President Jean Camus of the Veterans Association and all the Veterans here today for the contribution you made for France and for the Allies. I thank you Monsieur and Madame Camus also for your devotion in keeping this cemetery in such magnificent condition. The trust which the Commonwealth War Graves Commission has placed in you is well deserved.

I thank you M Jacques Paris, president of Association Normande du Souvenir Aérien together with all your members who do so much to keep the memory alive of the Allied airmen who lost their lives over French soil. I also thank those friends of my father who did so much to get this plaque made.

I would like to describe briefly, the contribution made by the people of Southern Rhodesia to the Allied effort in WWII. It is a small country, located to the north of South Africa, richly endowed with human and natural resources.

In 1939, it was a Colony of the British Empire. Using the colonial terminology of those times, it had a population of 60 000 Europeans and about 1.5 million Africans.

Today we are all Zimbabweans, but I refer to those who we commemorate today as Rhodesians, not only for the reason of historical accuracy, but also as a mark of respect and pride.

On 3 September 1939, Britain declared war on Germany. One month later, the Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia stated that more than 2/3rds of the Colony's total available manpower had already volunteered for military service. Their goal was simple: to beat Hitler.

With the support of the British Government, the first Rhodesian Air Training Group was opened in May 1940. About 360 pilots, technicians, wireless operators and mechanics arrived from Britain to establish the first school in the Empire Air Training Scheme. The second Empire school was established in Canada shortly afterwards.

By April 1941, there were 9 such schools in Rhodesia, for training pilots, bomb aimers, air gunners and instructors. Thousands of RAF airmen from Rhodesia, Canada, and Australia trained in these schools. Most of them went into one of 3 specially nominated Rhodesian squadrons.

237 (Rhodesia) Squadron, a fighter squadron commenced active operations in East Africa, then moved through North Africa, Iraq and then Italy and southern France. We are pleased to have from 237 Squadron Bill Musgrave with us today, who was a Spitfire pilot on active service in 1944-45.

266 (Rhodesia) Squadron also flew fighters and was based in southern England. From July 1941, about half the pilots in this squadron were Rhodesians. This squadron played a leading role in the Battle of Normandy, particularly over Falaise. During one of these aerial battles, in June 1944, Wilfred Royce Love, a Typhoon pilot from Rhodesia in 266 Squadron was shot down near Ste Marguerite des Loges and is buried here. His cousin Owen Love was killed over Beauvais in December 1951 whilst flying a Spitfire ferry back to Rhodesia. He is also buried here. Another of those Spitfire ferry pilots, David Barbour, was instrumental in getting this plaque made in Zimbabwe.

We are pleased to have John Love, the brother of Royce Love with us today, from Zimbabwe.

The third was 44 (Rhodesia) Squadron, which was formed in 1917 and its commanding officer was Bomber Harris, later to become commander in chief of Bomber Command. Harris had been a farmer in Southern Rhodesia. This was the first RAF squadron to go operational with the Lancaster bomber in 1942. From August 1994, about half the pilots in 44 squadron were from Rhodesia. 44 (Rhodesia) Squadron of the Royal Air Force, with its proud tradition continues to operate till this day.

I would add that many Rhodesians also went into other squadrons of the RAF.

Like the people of Ste Marguerite des Loges, who paid such a high price for Liberty during those terrifying war years, many Rhodesian and other Allied airmen also paid a very high price. Between June and July 1944, for example, 44 Squadron lost 22 Lancasters, out of its fleet of 26. When my father joined this squadron one month later in August 1944, not one pilot, other than the commanding officer, had completed more than 13 sorties. A complete tour of duty was 30 sorties. To be an airman in Bomber Command was the most dangerous of any of the Allied services.

Of the total of 2 409 Rhodesian airmen who served in WWII, 697 or nearly 29% never returned.

What were these young Rhodesian men like? Full of pranks and high spirits, boisterous and fun loving. They knew each other from school days and on the sports fields. They were all on first name terms and shared a camaraderie and team spirit which helped them to survive and to lead. Highly disciplined, highly trained and highly skilled, they were brave and courageous too, and many were highly decorated.

Today we commemorate all those Rhodesian airmen who lost their lives over the battlefields of France. Thanks to the work of devoted researchers in Zimbabwe and England, we have the names of 51 of them who died over France. Most of them did not reach their 22nd birthday.

I hope that in the future it will be possible to put up a list of their names in this beautiful village to accompany this plaque made from Zimbabwe granite.

We remember them and those 10 villagers who died in that Allied incident on 25 June 1944 and the 16 year old Resistance fighter Gilbert Lecor who had such courage and strength.

They gave their lives so that Europe and the world would conquer evil and inhumanity, so that Europe and the world would become civilised and free again.

We remember too the families and friends of the departed, who feel the loss of their loved ones and their friends to this day.

May the souls of all those we remember know that their sacrifices are honoured down to this day. With the creation and installation of this plaque and the steadfastness of the people of Ste Marguerite des Loges, we affirm their sacrifices will be honoured by the generations to come.

May the souls of all we remember be at peace and help us to find peace in our world.