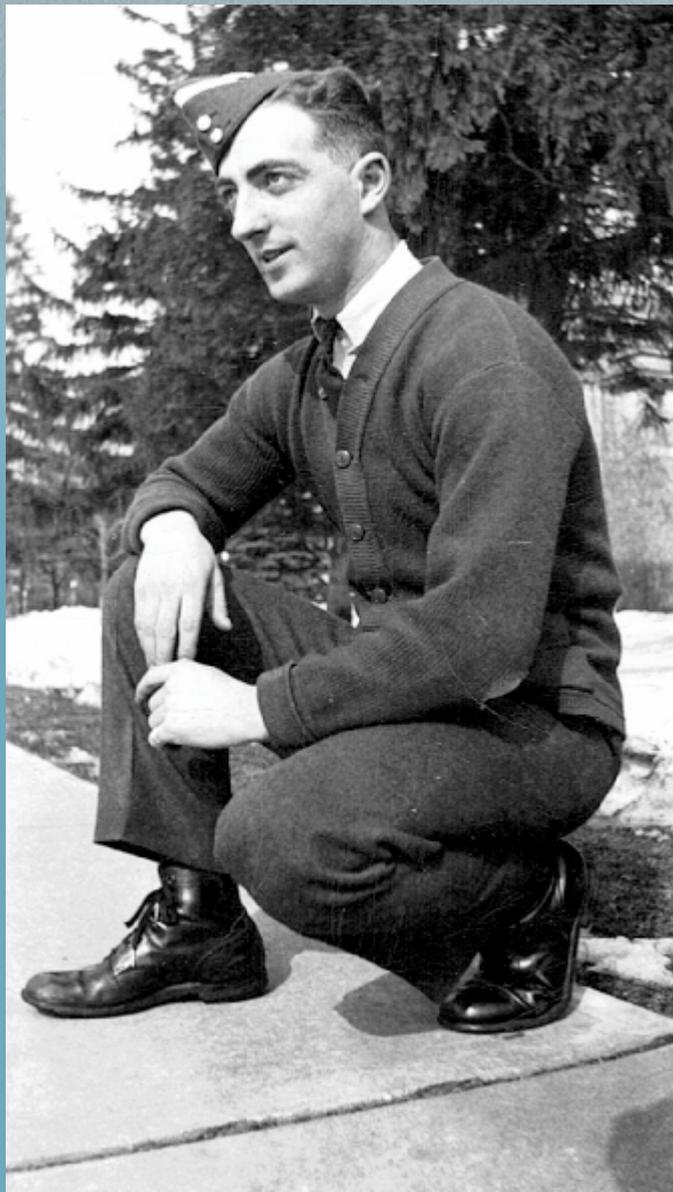




IN HONOUR OF MY FATHER

A Book of Remembrance
by The Honourable Terrence Platana



Daniel Domminique
Platana, DFC

Flying Officer, Air Gunner
Royal Canadian Air Force



DEDICATION

I dedicate this memorial book to Flying Officer Daniel Dominique Platana DFC RCAF, the father I never knew, the father whose life I will never forget.

In putting this book together, I treasure the memories of the family who lost their son and brother: my grandparents Antoine and Marthe; his sisters Monique and Jacqueline; his brothers Gaston and Harvey. They welcomed and accepted my mother and I lovingly into their family.

Of course, it brought back many memories of my mother, Sarah, or Sadie as she preferred to be called. I can only hope that I have lived my life giving to others the love and values she tried to instill in me.

It has taken many years to bring this project to fruition. Throughout those years my wife Madeleine and daughters Allison and Cynthia have been a constant source of love, support and encouragement, and I am deeply grateful to them. I thank Madeleine for her patience and understanding, her input and her love for helping me realize this many years long project.

For me, this book has accomplished what I had hoped for. It has given me a sense of who my father was and what his life must have been like in his 21 years, particularly in his service years, and has allowed me to share that life with others.

Per Ardua ad Astra
I will remember!

The Honourable Terrence Platana

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I express sincere thanks to Laurie Abthorpe who spent many hours in suggesting the layout of pages and in designing the front cover. I much appreciated her patience and understanding in reviewing the many drafts.

Without her guidance this memorial book may have remained forever only in my head.

I also thank many friends who have supported and encouraged me with the interest in what this book represents for me

Author and editor Justice Terrence Platana
Front cover design and book layout by Laurie Abthorpe
French translations by Sarah Gordon

Excerpts from the book *Massacre Over the Marne* have been reprinted with permission by its author.

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INTRODUCTION

RCAF Flying Officer Daniel Dominique Platana DFC was the son of Antoine and Marthe Platana, brother of Monique (deceased age 9), Jacqueline, Gaston and Harvey, husband of Sarah (Sadie) Sharpe, and my father.

He was born September 25, 1922 in Sinaluta, Saskatchewan and raised on Pasqua Reserve where his father was the farm instructor for the Department of Indian Affairs. He attended public school in Sinaluta. The family later moved to Regina where he attended high school. He spent much time on his grandparents', Alfred and Victorine Latreille, farm situate 9 miles south of Indian Head in the Qu'Appelle Valley. After high school he worked as a mechanic prior to enlistment.



Daniel as a toddler



Family with Grandparents Latreille, 1935



Family farm in Qu'Appelle Valley south of Indian Head, 1936



Marthe, Monique, Jacqueline and Daniel, 1925



Antoine and Marthe Platana, 1926



Daniel and Jacqueline, 1926



Antoine, Marthe, Daniel and Monique, 1926



Monique, Jacqueline and Daniel, 1928



Jacqueline, Daniel (back) Gaston and Lazure cousins in front, 1932



Platana's with Pony Freddy ,1936



Home in Regina, 2336 Hamilton St., 1941



Family, 1935



Daniel with Grandmère Latreille
First Communion, July 1939



Daniel with his Mother Marthe,
1941



Father with Harvey, Daniel, Jacqueline
and Gaston



Daniel with his parents, Jacqueline
and Gaston, 1942

He enlisted in the RCAF in May 1941 at the age of 18. He trained at Fingal and Guelph and graduated in May 1942 with the rank of Sergeant Air Gunner. He was drafted overseas the same month. On arrival overseas he was attached to Coastal Command.

In Spring 1943 he volunteered for operational duty in North Africa. He served one tour as a member of 425 (Alouette) Squadron RCAF in North Africa. On return to England he was promoted to Pilot Officer in August 1943 and was transferred to Bomber Command as an instructor in air gunnery. In February 1944 he volunteered for a second tour of duty and was attached to 156 Squadron RAF (Pathfinders) part of Bomber Command at RAF Upwood.

He was the 21 year old tail gunner in a Lancaster bomber when his aircraft was shot down on his 18th mission in his second tour of Operations on a bombing mission to the railway marshalling yards at Revigny, France, July 15 1944. He, along with four other members of his crew, are buried in the communal cemetery in Ancerville, France. The body of one, a Belgian, was later returned to and is buried in Belgium. A sixth body was not found in the forest until March 1945. There were 2 survivors, one of which escaped and one became a prisoner of war.



Cemetery at Ancerville, France, July 17, 1944

He married Sarah (Sadie) Sharpe) June 5, 1944. My parents were married for six weeks before he was killed. I was born March 8, 1945.

When the War ended, my mother, who had been a member of the RAF Womens Auxiliary Air Force, had only an aunt and step-brother left in England, her parents having died when she was young. Following the war, plans were made for us to come to Canada and on February 10, 1946 we arrived at Pier 21 in Halifax. After a long three day train ride we arrived in Regina, Saskatchewan on February 14, 1946. We were met at the train station by the entire Platana family, a moment which my mother described as one of the most frightening, and yet, one of the happiest moments of her life.

I was raised in Regina and my grandparents and other family members were a very large part of my early years. There was much reference made in those years, particularly by my grandmother, to the father I never knew, the son she never forgot. My grandfather had served in both World Wars, in the First, overseas, including the Battle of the Somme, and in the Second, as a member of the Home Guard in Canada. The military played a prominent role in our family, with my grandparents heavily involved with the Royal Canadian Legion. Remembrance Day was, and remains for me, one of the most important days of the year.

As I think of his embarkation I know that he had departed from Halifax and I recalled the time Madeleine and I visited Pier 21 in Halifax. We toured through the Customs Hall, set up as it would have been on February 10, 1946, the day my mother and I arrived at Pier 21 on the Cunard ship Mauretania. I sat on one of the benches and I tried to imagine what it must have been like for my 21 year-old mother, sitting on a bench in the Customs Hall along with hundreds of others, feeling alone and uncertain, waiting to be processed. She had often told me of her concern that I had developed the whooping cough, and her fear that they would not let us board the train to Montreal and on to Saskatchewan where she would meet the family she had never met.

One of the impressive features in Pier 21 is a virtual train ride from Halifax across the country. I recall feeling amazed, and somewhat subdued, as the virtual train passed through the countryside, passing Quebec City, Montreal, through the lakes and trees of Northwest Ontario, where I now live, and on through the vastness of the prairies. I could not help but think of my mother and other young women like her who, after leaving Liverpool on February 4th, and arriving in Canada on February 10th, now found herself sitting on a train for another 4 days, carrying an 11 month old infant son, looking at the vastness of such a large and strange country, not knowing what to expect on her arrival at her destination and her new life.

Later, as we stood outside on the Pier, it struck me that this pier, or one nearby, was the last place my father had been in Canada, and it was the first place that I, at 11 months old, had ever touched Canada. I recall standing on the pier with Madeleine and just bursting out in tears, literally sobbing and in many ways questioning 'why' he was one of so many who left their country at that place, never really considering that they might never return. Although he had never returned to his native land, it seemed to me that I had been then, and now, here to assume his place. Looking at all the plaques on the wall and seeing so many names gave me an immense sense of sadness, not only for myself, but for all the other sons and daughters who lost their father. Pier 21 has taken on a whole new significance for me. It has somehow become a link to allow me to live a life he never lived.

We later made arrangements to have a plaque with his name placed on the Wall of Service, and a similar plaque with my mother's name honouring her service in the Women's Royal Air Force and as a War Bride.

TO EXAMINING OFFICIALS:

THE BEARER

MRS SARAH PLATANA

is travelling to Canada under the Free Passage Scheme of the Canadian Government for the wives, widows and children of members of the Canadian Forces Overseas.



PASSENGER AND PERMIT OFFICE.

EXIT PERMIT #120904

Valid for departure before

17 APRIL 1945

End for one journey only.

Holder is travelling to:

CANADA



DIRECT OR VIA U.S.A.
(IN TRANSIT ONLY)

Photograph of Bearer.



S. Platana

Signature of Bearer.

National Registration Code.

FFN

1687926

Names of Children (under 16 years of age) accompanying holder:

TERRENCE ANTOINE PLATANA



V-I S.A. (if required.)



LANDED Immigrant



CANADIAN TRAVEL CERTIFICATE

No 3707

Valid for single journey to Canada direct or via the United States of America.

Name of Holder: (8933)

MRS SARAH PLATANA

Issued by authority of the High Commissioner for Canada at Canada House, London, S.W. 1.

on JAN 15 1945

IMPORTANT. This document which must be produced to the Immigration Officer at the port of embarkation is valid only for one journey to Canada within a period of twelve months from the date of issue and should be surrendered, if requested, on arrival at a Canadian port. Its loss before sailing must be reported immediately to the Passage Priority Committee at Canada House, London, S.W.1



Arrival in Regina

Terrence Platana with Mother meeting Daniel's Family for the first time. February 14, 1946
Sadie and Terrence arrived into Canada through Halifax February 10, 1946 aboard the MAURETANIA then boarded the train to Regina meeting her husband's family for the first time.

As I was growing older, and after my grandparents had visited France, I regularly heard the name "Ancerville" spoken of. I came to learn of the importance of it to my family as the place my father was buried. My grandmother, in particular, had very deep emotional memories of my father. My grandparents had received some of his belongings which had been shipped home from England, including uniforms, flight suit and other items, many of which were unfortunately destroyed in a flood.

I did not know until after my grandmother died that she had a small box where she had kept every one of the letters - approximately 100 of them- my father had written home to her from the time he enlisted until he was killed, although the letters slowed down after he was married! My aunt Jacqueline had also saved the letters sent to her, including some sent to her by my mother after her husband was killed. I have had these letters for years with the intent of someday putting the information together.

Over the years I have been increasingly curious about what my father's life must have been like. My Aunt Jacqueline has told me stories about their early life on a Reserve near Sintaluta. She remembers my father as a very good rider and talked often about she and her brothers riding horseback to school in the summer and in a cutter in the winter. She told me about his hard work, and his talent as a crack marksman. She laughed when she told me of his practical jokes, and in particular the time in winter when, after a large snowfall, he convinced his brother Gaston and some friends to help him pile snow up against the schoolhouse and they then dragged the cutter up onto the roof.

She told me stories about the time spent on my great-grandparents farm near Indian Head Saskatchewan. My great-grandparents were from France and French was the family language. I am quite certain that my father had been part of the bilingual animated discussions that took place around the dinner table when all the family were gathered. When thinking of the farm, I remember one day when we were visiting the farm and were wandering in the orchard picking apples. At one point my aunt started to cry and when I asked what was wrong, she said she was remembering the times she and my father used to play in that same orchard, and how at that moment she saw him in me.

I heard the stories, but was still curious about his war-time life. I began to read any book I could find about Bomber Command's role in the Second World War, about the crews, and in particular about tail gunners. In 1981 I wrote a letter to the Pathfinder Association publication asking if anyone could share any information about him personally. The letter was published in the Association magazine, *The Marker*, and I received back letters from around the world, mostly with much general information, but none with any specifics from anyone who had known him.

I became aware of, and joined, 156 Squadron Association, the RAF Squadron to which he was attached, hoping to get some information from members who had served in the squadron at RAF Upwood in 1944. In August 2005, my wife and I travelled to England to take part in an Association meeting. Although I did not meet anyone who had known my father personally, I did meet some wonderful men and their wives who told me of some of their experiences of what life in those years had been like. I learned that Bomber crews were usually very close-knit and spent most of their time together. As one of the 156 Association members told me "It was easier to think that if you went down, your closest friends would be with you." A highlight of that trip for me was seeing one of the two remaining Lancasters in the world which are still flying – a tremendous emotional experience for me. When I asked what direction it would come from, one of the veterans said "You'll hear it

before you see it. " He was right, and I became very choked up when in the first of several passes, the pilot dipped the wings in the traditional sign of acknowledgement and respect.

Two years ago, when I began to write this memorial, Remembrance Day 2018 was just one week away. I recall standing sorrowfully, but proudly, at the cenotaph, honouring my father and all those who gave their lives, who gave so much so that I could have the life I have had. I have waited with anticipation, and trepidation, each year as I know the time is coming for me to hear the sound of the piper's "Lament", the emotional "Abide with Me", the "Reveille" and to say the words which are for me, and I hope so important for all, "We will remember them."

This book is a collection of photos, stories, excerpts from letters, personal and Operational Records, all of which are my way of putting together the history of the father I never knew. I have used all these materials to try and give me some sense of what his life must have been like. It is my attempt to give life to a life never fully lived, and to honour and respect him.



Left and Centre: Daniel and Jacqueline Right: Daniel with mother and grandparents

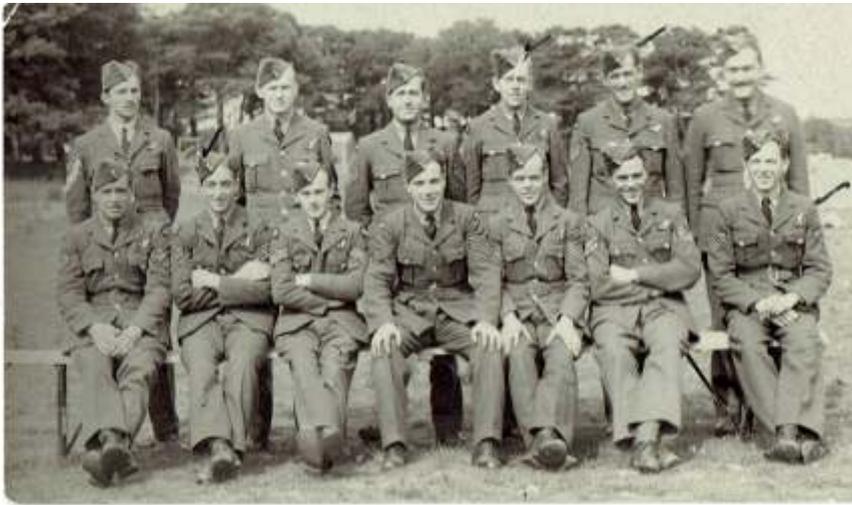


Daniel with a friend on leave, 1942

LETTERS HOME

In the 2019 Remembrance Day television broadcast, the commentator read excerpts from letters which some servicemen had written home during the war. Many of them were very personal and spoke of the conditions they were experiencing. I was touched as I tried to imagine the men behind the words on the paper.

As I listened to the letters being read by the commentators I thought of the letters my Grandparents and Aunt Jacqueline had received from my father and which my grandmother had kept in a small box. I read all of the letters, about 100 of them. It was very apparent that my father would never have met the standard of a Shakespeare, a Margaret Atwood, or any of my favourite mystery writers!



Daniel Platana, front row, second from left. Advanced B&G Class.

I thought of his letters, some less than a page, the longest being 4 pages on airmail paper, many in pencil, but each saying something about him. I remarked that in many time frames, the letters were almost daily, wondering how things were at home, reminding his sister and brothers to help their mother, and to make sure they studied hard. Some spoke of his grandparents on the farm and wishing he could be home eating a family dinner with all of them. Several spoke of being lonely and hoping to soon return home.

What impacted on me is that none of the letters ever spoke of any danger he ever felt. From other sources I learned that while in North Africa on a mission over Italy, his aircraft was shot down and the crew were rescued at sea. I have also later in this book detailed his experience of a difficult landing and his reaction to it. None of the letters home gave any indication of these incidents. The other impression the letters gave me was that of a very young man, very much longing to be at home, but understanding very well that he had a job to do.

It would be too long to put all the letters into this memorial book so I have included only excerpts from some of them. The letters are important to me, as they are the best source I have to try and frame a picture of what my father's life was like at different points in his life. Most are dated, however, some I have had to try and date by reference to the contents. Some I cannot date. In the early letters to his parents he wrote:

June 10 (Initial Training School)

Still working hard as hell from 6 in the morning 9:00 at night. When we come out of here we get our LAC stripes. We were given our rifle and bayonet with the belts which are valued at \$125.00 so if we lose them or get them stolen we buy them. We keep these at our bunk every night....

I have got most of my uniforms now. My blue uniform, khaki uniform and fatigue pants 2 pairs, 4 shirts, but I still have to buy dress shirts...

The course we are taking takes one month but we have to cover it in one week, then we start our wireless training. ITS is initial training school. When we come out of here we get LAC stripes and 75c a day extra

September 6

Here are all my expenses for a Sat in Guelph. Valentine cards \$1.62, razor blades 25c, stamps 25c, shave cream and toothpaste 75c, laundry 78c, writing paper 35c, smokes for 1 week \$1.00, uniform cleaned and pressed 50c. In all it adds up to \$4.99 and a 35c meal, \$5.34 so I'm flat until Thurs now.



A
Merry Christmas
and a Happy
New Year 

Dear Dad.

I recieved both your letters and was very pleased. This little card is just a little present. So try and send me a picture of yourself.

I've been working hard there last few weeks. and I try more than this Saturday they will decide whether I pass or not. I have faith in myself so I think I will make the grade.

Well Dear Daddy here is a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year will write more next week. Loving son
xxx Dan.

OVERSEAS – BRITAIN AND NORTH AFRICA

He was drafted overseas and embarked on June 14, 1942.

July 7

As for me, I'm as lonely and blue as hell. Golly would I ever like to go home for a week, but I guess I'd better forget that. During the last weeks I've felt so damned lonely and miserable.

We went to a church service in Westminster Abbey. I also saw the king and queen from a very close distance. . . I don't think the people here realize that anyone wearing a Canadian uniform is a volunteer.

July 27

"My dear dad." Please give me some advice. I am going to volunteer to go to the Middle east but I don't want to tell mother until I get an answer from you, so please tell me what you think.

On September 20, 1942 he began Operational Training at 19 O.T.U. at RAF Kinloss flying in a Whitley with Sgt. Hawkins as pilot. In November he was posted to 10 O.T.U. at St. Eval where the primary duty was anti-submarine patrol.

On January 24, 1943 he began a posting at 1660 Conversion Unit at RAF Swinderly, flying in Manchesters.



Photo with Hawkins and crew. Daniel Platana, second from right.

On February 9, 1943 he was posted to newly formed, predominantly French Canadian, 425 Alouette Squadron (Je Te Plumerai) at Dishforth flying in Wellingtons as part of Coastal Command. The squadron was the fifth Canadian heavy bomber squadron established overseas during the War and was attached to 4 Group Bomber Command of the Royal Air Force. In January 1943 the squadron was transferred to 6 Group.

I was interested when reading his confidential personal assessment when at RAF Dishforth February 24, 1943. He is noted as "being able to state what he means clearly; does not back down too easily; has no difficulty in understanding; displays initiative; applies himself diligently; can be relied upon to successfully complete the most difficult jobs; definitely promotes harmony and good will among his associates; occasionally takes the lead; superior in organizes effectively and gets things done; knowing his work and doing it well; others can definitely depend upon his loyalty." He is rated as a "very good air gunner, keen and conscientious."

In a history of 425 Squadron written by Jean Pariseau in the magazine "Canadian Defence Quarterly" in summer 1981, the author describes that in 1943 the squadron was specifically tasked with a new mission linked to the protection of supply lines in Great Britain and the bombing of industrial facilities, fuel supply depots and submarine bases on the coast in Europe, a role which was particularly dangerous because of the heavy anti-aircraft protection. In November and December 1943 the squadron was tasked with the role of clearing mines on the European coast, a role, which I presume, is shown in the logbooks as "gardening."

He served at Dishforth until spring of 1943 when he volunteered for operational duty in North Africa. He arrived at Kairouan, Tunisia in North Africa on June 3, 1943. Excerpts from some of the letters home give some idea of his time in North Africa.

June 9 (Algeria)

I've been here for a week now. I've been to French Morocco. It really is a strange country but I think that I shall enjoy it... I had my first bath in one of those sulphurs, boy its really swell.

June 22

I've seen several camel trains being driven by Arabs. It's nothing like what a person expects it to be. The donkeys are all flea-bitten.

July 8 1943

I'm feeling very well and getting used to the heat in this country, one day it was 125. I've also got a lovely tan... Well, I've done my 19th op.

July 22

Thanks for the clipping where it says something about aircrew going home before starting a second tour of ops, well if that's all I will be there, but I'm afraid I don't believe a word of it, but it may be true with us because I'm nearly finished my first lot and will be going as an instructor.

July 26

The news was very good this morning, old Musso has resigned. Just had dinner, not too bad, stew, potatoes, marrow, and custard pie. It was nice but I'm a little tired of this kind of food, time I had some chicken. I've been promised a nice chicken dinner when I get back in England for my 21st birthday. Won't be long now.

August 15

It's really warm today. We had real honest steak and it was really very good. I can just imagine you at home or Granny's having a chicken dinner or turkey for all I know. I've got a really swell beard

August 16

I'm getting fed up with this country but there's a job to be done so the sooner we finish the better for us.

Other letters spoke of living in tents. The mess hall was a tent. The letters spoke of leisure time with baseball games against the other Canadian squadrons in North Africa and movies on outdoor screens. Although his letters make no reference of it, from other books of men who served in North Africa at the same time, reference is made to a live performance of the most-appreciated Bob Hope who entertained with his wonderful cast of singers and dancers.

The log books make reference on some occasions to "heavy flack" or "attacked by fighter." One entry notes "Eng wounded by flack." After completion of one tour of duty in action over Sicily, he was commissioned as a Pilot Officer in August 1943. He returned to Britain with his squadron in November and began duty as an air gunnery instructor.



Daniel Platana, front row, second from left.

November 10

I've finished my first tour of ops. I am now at an AG school waiting to go on an instructors' course. I'm the youngest in our mess. They know I don't touch it, so no one offers me anything but lemonade

November 13

I am all through my ops 37 in all so that's not bad.

November 29

I hope you will forgive me for tearing off the top of the paper but the name of the station is stamped on it so we are not allowed to leave it in. In any case I think it is ok to tell you that I am on English soil again.

December 12

I've seen Bill Hawkins my old pilot last week and I'm going to see my old navigator. Boy I really miss them they are just like a couple of brothers. We were together for over a year and flew together all the time.

PATHFINDER FORCE

Early in 1944 he volunteered for a second tour of duty and on February 25, 1944 was assigned to 156 Squadron, Pathfinder Force, Royal Air Force flying in Lancasters. Pathfinder Force was formed in August 1942 with the object of securing more concentrated and effective bombing by marking targets with incendiary bombs and flares from aircraft flown by experienced crews and using the latest navigational equipment. No. 156 was one of the four squadrons selected to form the nucleus of the new force. The squadron motto was "We light the way." His pride in this posting is shown in his letter home dated early in 1944.

"If the censors don't mind, I can say that I'm flying in Lancasters. I hope you've heard what a wonderful good plane they are, but don't tell anyone."

March 1 1944

I'm now flying with a Squadron Leader well he's married to a WAF officer who is getting her discharge and they asked me if I'd ask you to send some silk stockings good ones and they'll fix it up and I'll send it on to you. So please try about ½ dozen pairs.

March 20 1944

I'm starting a second tour of ops next month on Pathfinders. I have a Squadron Leader pilot this time. I would love to have gone back with Bob but that is out. Oh well, this fellow is a swell egg. It won't take long to do a tour so I should be home this summer.

March 31 1944

I thought I should explain why I went back on ops. I was instructing on the Isle of Mann. I had a chance for ops again with an all-officers crew, all with one tour of ops in so I was told I should be allowed to go home for good probably after two tours. I said OK and signed on the dotted line.



SARAH (SADIE) SHARPE

– my mother.

In the small pocket diary kept by my father the entry referencing December 12, 1943 reads “Met Sadie Sharpe. A swell kid, bags of fun.” This is the first indication of my father's introduction to his future wife, my mother. She was then in the Women’s Royal Air Force attached to the Signals Branch.

My father was clearly not someone who wrote in his diary on a regular basis. The diary entries following have notes of he and my mother spending New Years Eve together, almost daily phone calls, and/or quick visits when both were off-duty. There are few entries between February 9 and April 12, 1944.

Many of the letters home to his parents and sister spoke of Sadie.



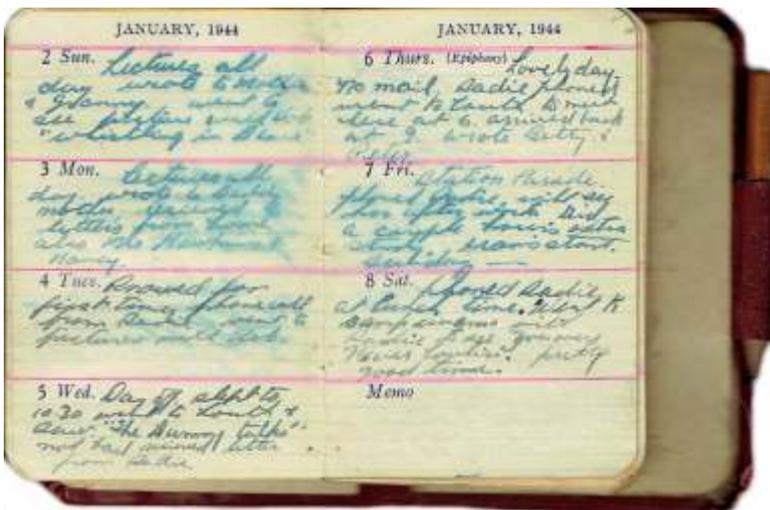
March 12 1944

I can only wish to see you soon. I should say for 1945. I'll be 22 then, over 4 years since I left home, not bad. I've met a little red-haired girl who I think is just about the sweetest one I've ever met.

March 23 1944

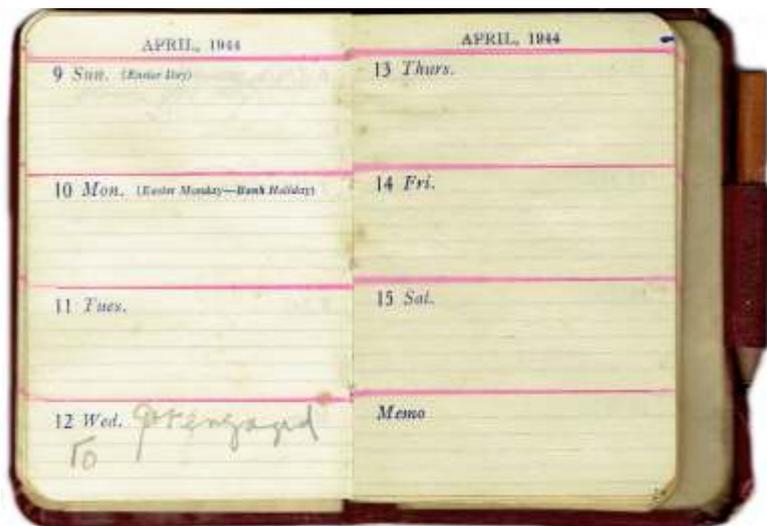
I'm going to write you a long letter in the near future... be prepared to read for an hour. It should make you very happy as well as all the rest.

***YOUR LOVING SON



March 24 1944

Here goes for the long letter which I promised you in last nights' airgraph. please be very patient and read carefully because I'm not 19 now as I was when I left home... I'm getting engaged as soon as possible and when I'm finished this lot I'm getting married... I should be finished by next October and then I'll be going home and bring Sadie with me. It's no use asking me not to mother because I've made up my mind and you always said anything I did was OK... I saved some up and I will sell my motorcycle.

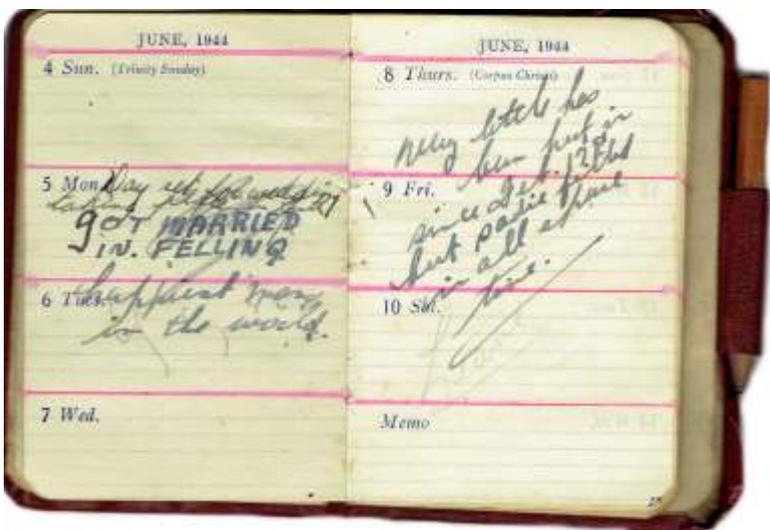


April 12, 1944

"Got engaged."

May 14, 1944

"As you know we are getting married on June 5th, a very quiet affair, not really what we wanted but since none of you will be here and she has no parents that's all it will be... My chances of being home within the next 10 months are slim because as you know my skipper is a Squadron Leader and we don't get many trips done in a month, but that's life, only 22 more, so it's not really bad. P.S. note promotion to flying officer."



June 5, 1944

"Got married in Felling. Happiest man in the world."



Daniel and Sadie Platana

Married on June 5, 1944 at
St. Patrick's Cathedral
Felling-on-Tyne, England



Best Man Wo1 James Cooney, Groom, Bride, Bridesmaid Nan Cooney and unknown

June 8, 1944

"Very little has been put in since Feb 12th but Sadie filled in all spare time."

There are no entries in the diary past this date.

When I reflect on the fact that my parents met on December 5th, got engaged on April 12th and married on June 5th, I have a better understanding of why my mother did not appear to be overwhelmed and anxious when I took Madeleine Dupuis home after we had known each for other 6 weeks to tell my mother that we were engaged. We had met March 6th, engaged in 6 weeks, and married in 6 months. Madeleine was then 21. Looking back after 48 years of marriage I think that I would have had a good response if my mother had suggested that our engagement and marriage was too quick! In spite of my reasoning in my case, my daughters are still waiting for me to answer the question as to what I would have said if one of them had come home after 6 weeks to tell me she had met someone 6 weeks previously and they were getting married!

Although my mother remarried later when I was 10, she carried with her an element of guilt for having done so for the rest of her life. She clearly never forgot my father and their short time together. I remember one day in the 1980s riding in the car with her when she started to cry spontaneously. I asked her what was wrong. She replied that she was thinking about him and a time they were riding on a bus in London when on leave, speaking about the future, when he said to her "Promise me that if anything happens to me you won't remarry." Despite my efforts to convince her that was a "wartime promise", which I am sure was not intended to be kept, she carried it with her.

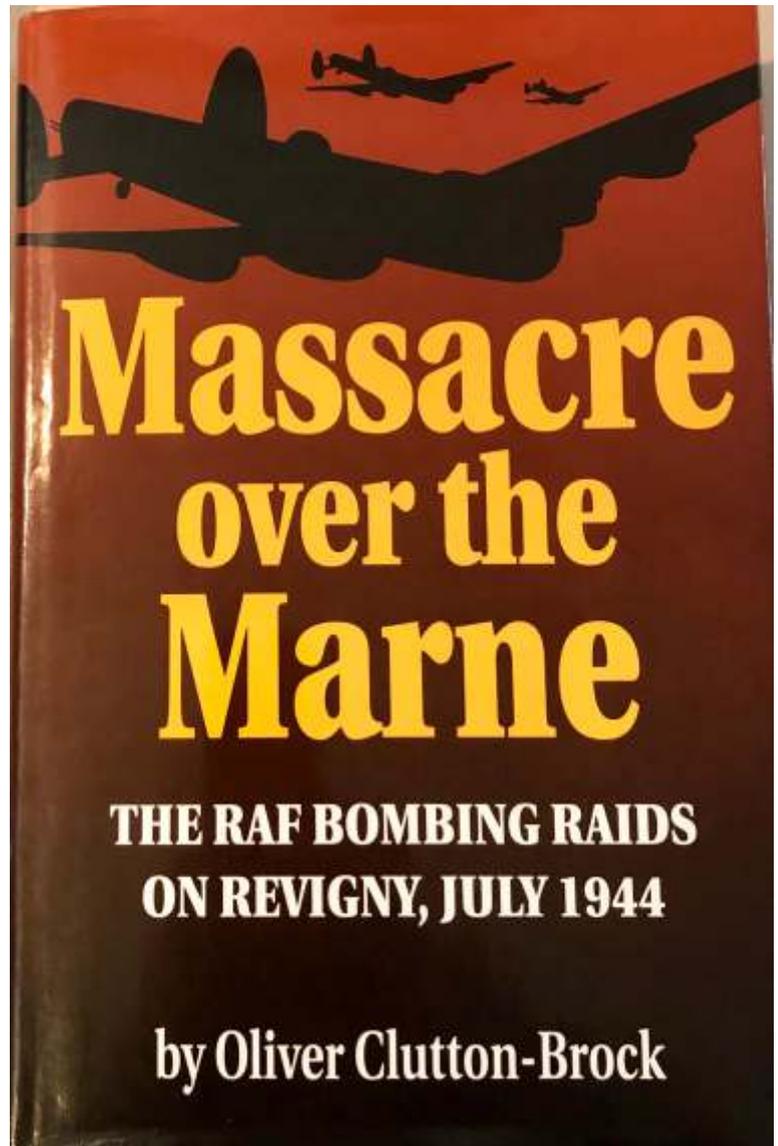
THE OPERATIONAL RECORDS

July 14/15 1944 - Operations over Revigny

When Madeleine and I travelled to the 156 Squadron Association Reunion in 2005, one of the people I met was the son of one of the members. He was an avid historian and had researched the squadron extensively. Information in the squadron record books and other records shows that the aircraft took off from Upwood at 2155 hours on July 14th and was last heard from over the target discussing the aiming point with the Master Bomber at 0153 hours. The aircraft was subsequently attacked by a German night fighter and crashed at about 0210 hours.

In the course of my research in the 1980s attempting to find someone who knew my father, I became aware of a book, "Massacre Over the Marne", written about the series of raids in July 1944 in which my father was killed. The best way to describe the night of July 14 when the aircraft was shot down is to use the words of the author, Oliver Clutton-Brock. I gratefully acknowledge the permission given by Mr. Clutton-Brock to quote from chapter 4 of his book directly. It is detailed and very historical. For me, a part of it is very personal as the author had an opportunity to meet with the pilot S/L Geoff Davies. He was one of two survivors of the crash and was able to provide specific details of the attack on the plane by a German night-fighter, including my father's last words over the intercom when instructed to bail out, "I'm going skip."

In speaking with someone at the 156 reunion who knew S/L Davies, he told me that following the war Davies was able to speak about the crash and some of his wartime experiences. However, he reached a point in his life where he was no longer able to talk about it. He suffered some distress when it was even mentioned, experiencing what my source said would probably today be known as PTSD.



The Second Raid – Homeward, 15 July 1944

As the Lancasters circled the target area, the Luftwaffe again made contact. Hitherto there had been no casualties but, at 0154 hours, a Lancaster was suddenly 'seen to burst into flames and crash to the ground' in the Revigny area. It was probably the handiwork of an FW190, as several crews reported having seen a Lancaster explode at 4,000 feet after being attacked by one.

The victim was probably LL837 'Q-Queenie', skippered by the 30-year old CO of 550 Squadron, W/C P. E. G. G. Connolly. LL837 crashed near Bussy-la-Côte, a few miles to the south-east of Revigny. Connolly and the rest of the crew (which included the Squadron Gunnery Leader, F/L K. W. L. Fuller DFC, who had only been posted from 12 Squadron on 9 July) were killed.

Connolly had joined 550 Squadron on 15 May 1944 and this was only his sixth operation with it but, in the words of the Squadron scribe, he had already 'proved himself to be a leader of men, a man of understanding and was liked by all with whom he came into contact. The squadron has lost not only an efficient commander but a very gallant gentleman.'

After nearly half a century Connolly is still remembered with respect and admiration by Tony McKernan:

'If ever I get the chance to visit France, I shall certainly say a prayer at his graveside . . . He was a very charming man, and a great leader. One example of this was a prang on take-off of "S-Sugar", always regarded as the Squadron "jinx" kite, and this was a brand spanking new "S". We were stood down, and acting "Cheer Party" at the [flying control] caravan. Les Wareham, our skipper, thought he could detect a slight "cough" from one of the engines as "S" turned on to the runway.

'However, as the engines were run up, the "cough" disappeared and on the green from the A.C.P. "S" trundled off down the runway. It hadn't got very far before it began to swing to the left on to the grass. The pilot corrected this and got it back on to the runway, but "S" had

other ideas and swung right on to the grass again. By this time we were all lying flat on the deck with faces in the mud, waiting for the big bang.

'Not so the Wingco — he was in his car and haring off down the runway after "S", which eventually finished up over an air raid shelter, close to the bomb storage — back broken, one engine on fire, but fortunately all the crew away and running like hares. Wingco calmly examined the aircraft and, having satisfied himself that all the crew were safe, waited to meet the fire crews as they arrived. Had that aircraft exploded, the whole bomb storage would have gone up and us with it. A very cool man was Connolly.'

* * *

Just before the raid was called off, the Deputy Master Bomber, who had been heard discussing the location of the AP with the Master Bomber, was heard no more. At 0157 hours Lancaster PA984, 156 Squadron, carrying the Deputy Master Bomber, S/L George Geoffrey Davies DSO, and his experienced crew, crashed into high ground 15 miles or so south of Revigny, killing six of the eight-man crew.

Geoff Davies had taken PA984 down to just a few hundred feet and was making height for the homeward trip when, without any warning, a night-fighter attacked from below and port quarter astern. Geoff flung the bomber into a 'corkscrew port', but not before the fighter had raked it from stem to stern. He was hit in the left wrist and left thigh but, receiving no instructions from the rear gunner, maintained a 'corkscrew port'. The rear gunner shouted out:

'We're on fire, Skip!'

'I know we're on fire,' replied Geoff. 'I'll try to get it out. Take it easy and watch for the fighters; but prepare to jump.'

The first attack by the fighter had started a fire in the bomb-bay, which held eight Red TIs, eight hooded flares and four 1,000 lb bombs. Thick, black smoke was filling the cockpit. Geoff was unable to read his instruments:

'I suspected that one of the TIs had been hit as the fire had a pronounced red glare. I immediately opened the bomb doors and gave the bomb-aimer his instructions for jettisoning TIs and bombs. Felt them go and tested on toggle, but the aircraft was still blazing away.

'The smoke by this time was absolutely solid, suffocating. Couldn't see or breathe, turned oxygen right up and clamped mask to face, but was still unable to breathe. I therefore opened the port side window and stuck my head out. I heard the engineer gasping and told him to do the same at his side. Judging by the draught he did so. I continued corkscrewing by touch as I was still unable to see instruments.

'I closed the bomb doors as soon as the load had gone in order to cut down the draught. However, the fire was still going strong, and the smoke was filling the cockpit. The aircraft controls then went u/s completely. Tried fore, then aft, finally the rudder. The flames were coming through the floor and I was on fire personally (helmet, hair, face, silk gloves, hands, scarf).

'I then ordered the crew "Jump! Jump!" and a few seconds later "Bale out, blokes, and let me know as you go". I heard the rear gunner say "I'm going, Skip!". I felt the draught from the front as if the escape hatch had been opened. Still holding my head out of the port window (at intervals), I saw (I think) two parachutes open. I heard no more from any other crew member, although my intercom was still working.

'I therefore called up the crew but received no answers. I decided it was time to get out, the controls being u/s, and I could see the ground which was pretty close. The aircraft was, as far as I could judge, in a shallow diving turn to port (the throttles had been left open as, due to lack of control, they were the only means of attempting to keep the nose up).

'I unplugged after taking a couple of deep breaths out of the window and made for the forward escape hatch, feeling for the engineer on the way. I could not find him and presumed he had got out. By this time flames were roaring in the cockpit between me and the hatch. I sat back for a final effort and leaned out of side window for another breather. Next I found myself out of the aircraft, presumably blown through the window.

'Rather dazed by smoke, heat and burns (eyes, hands, arms and hair) and bruised, I remember feeling a blow on my left side and leg. Then I remembered to pull the rip-cord and the parachute opened immediately. I hit the ground about 60 seconds later, crashing 50 or 60 feet through trees. The aircraft appeared to hit the ground a few seconds earlier (or may have been TIs burning).'

The remains of PA984 crashed to the ground at around 0200 hours. Only Geoff Davies and the bomb aimer, F/L K. Stevens, survived. Stevens baled out when the 'nose and centre section began to fall apart'. Five of the crew were found at or near the crash site and were buried at Ancerville. The sixth body, the flight engineer's, was only found on 23 March 1945, by a hunter in Valtiermont forest. The dead man's parachute had failed to open properly.*

Many years later the daughter of the Australian wireless operator (F/L H. G. M. Robinson DFC) visited the scene of the tragedy:

'I was taken to the forest where the aircraft had crashed. Unbelievably after 40 years I could see exactly where the wreckage had been. The whole place was heavily wooded apart from the area I have described. No trees or bushes had ever grown again.'

PA984 was shot down by a Ju88, possibly of 1/NJG 2. Flying nearby was Lancaster ED888 (P/O J. S. Griffiths, 576 Squadron) 'whose rear-gunner sighted a Ju88 in the glow of a burning Lancaster which it was

* F/O Fernand Camille Guillaume Debrock DFC (born in Ostende on 28 December 1907) was buried alongside his comrades at Ancerville the following day. On 9 May 1950, the Chief Administrative Officer of the Imperial War Graves Commission (French District) gave permission for the body to be exhumed and returned to Belgium. On 21 August 1950 this was done.

attacking'. The hungry Ju88, not satisfied with its victory over PA984, spotted veteran ED888 and began its approach. The two gunners fired long bursts at the enemy aircraft as it attacked from the fine port quarter down. Hit many times, the Ju88 burst into flames, dived down out of control, hit the ground and exploded.

Although too late to prevent the destruction of PA984, Griffiths's crew had the satisfaction of destroying its probable executioner. It was, incidentally, a joyous crew that landed safely at Chedburgh, where it had been diverted, some hours later. They had just completed their tour of 30 operations in three months!

Enemy night-fighters followed the Lancasters as they streamed homewards from Revigny. At 0200 hours/15 July the crew of LL748 (W/O W. H. S. Ansell, 550 Squadron) received a shock when a rocket projectile shot past their nose from right to left. Seconds later they saw an Me410, at which both gunners opened fire. Neither aircraft was damaged, but the Germans were not to be denied, and two minutes later they claimed their third victim for the night. ME755 (P/O W. A. H. Vaughan, 460 Squadron, on his 19th op) was shot down near Chevillon, Haute-Marne.

The 156 squadron log entry of Friday July 14, 1944 reads "6 aircraft detailed for a daylight raid on ST PHILLIBERTE FERME C/WORKS, all proceed and returned. 9 aircraft detailed for a night raid on REVIGNY MARSHALLING YARDS. F/L RC Wiseman DFC was Master Bomber and S/L G.G. Davies was Deputy Master Bomber. Cloud obscured the target and the M/B ordered the mission to be abandoned. 1 aircraft missing from this raid S/L G.G. Davies DSO and crew."

Excerpts from the book *Massacre Over the Marne* have been reprinted with permission by its author.

LOG BOOKS

The log books required to be maintained by all aircrew were returned to his parents after he was killed. Some entries are of particular interest to me which put into a personal perspective many of the probably typical incidents in the life of a bomber command aircrew.

April 9, 1944, "OPS over Lillie collided with lanc 83 sqn over target."

May 3, 1944, "OPS Mont Didier airfield. Whizzo trip".

May 11, 1944, "OPS Hasselt. Tyre burst on landing. Bomb load brought back." This entry is of particular interest to me. When I attended the 156 Squadron Association Annual Meeting in 2005, I received copies of the squadron Log Book and Operations Book. In reviewing the entries, the following is noted: "One aircraft, captain S/L G.G. Davies DSO hit by F/A, puncturing the tyre. Aircraft landed at base runway and the tyre caught fire. The aircraft had full bomb load and the runway was temporarily blocked. Fire put out by Crash Tender."

This same landing was described in a book written by Michael Wadsworth, "They Led the Way - The Story of Pathfinder Squadron 156." Taken from personal interviews, he describes that in an attack on the aircraft by an enemy fighter, one of the tires had been punctured and in an attempt to land at Upwood one of the tires of S/L Davies aircraft caught fire. The runway was temporarily unusable as the Lancaster had just skated across the runway with its tire on fire and a full bomb load. Fortunately firefighters dealt effectively with the blaze.

Considering the squadron records, the May 11th entry in his log book entry has always been of particular interest me. I cannot imagine the number of times that an aircraft would have returned from a bombing run relieved at the end of a mission having survived anti-aircraft fire and night fighters, only to face the danger of having to land with a damaged aircraft and full bomb load. It seems to describe the way so many of the aircrew dealt with potentially very dangerous situations as just another landing.

There are many other entries noting such entries as "good trip", "bang on", "flak heavy". As I was reading through the log entries I recalled that all the "OPS" were night operations.

July 15, 1944 - The final entry in the log books made by the Officer Commanding B Flight 156 Squadron is simply and directly stated, "Failed to return from last operation". The log book then shows a total of 241.00 hours day flying time and 249.35 night time.

Time	Date	Strength	Type	Remarks	Time	Date
2:17		Q	1/2 B-24	AC	OPS over Lillie	2:17
6		S	1/2 B-24	AC	OPS over Lillie	2:20
7:24		S	1/2 B-24	AC	OPS over Lillie	2:24
11:20		T	1/2 B-24	AC	OPS over Lillie	2:20
11:20		T	1/2 B-24	AC	OPS over Lillie	2:20
11:20		Q	1/2 B-24	AC	OPS over Lillie	2:20
11:20		Q	1/2 B-24	AC	OPS over Lillie	2:20

OFFICIAL NOTIFICATIONS

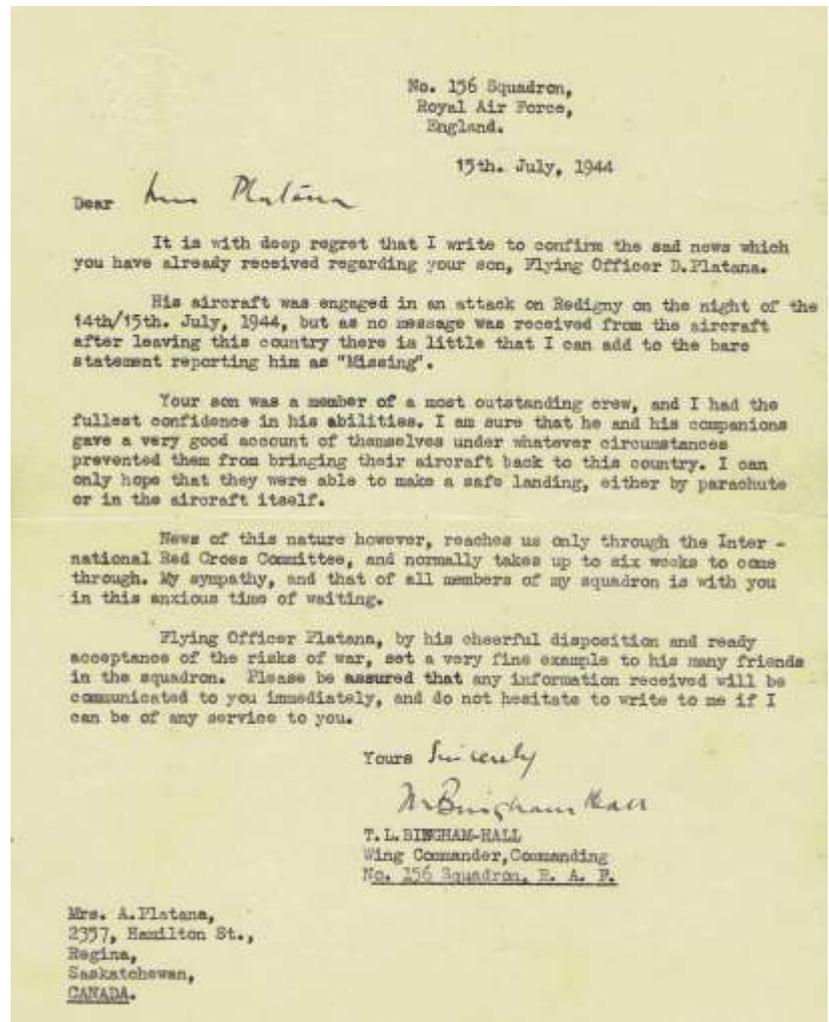
It is always striking to me when I read the original telegram sent to my grandfather on July 16, 1944 from the RCAF Casualty Officer:

"regret to advise that your son flying officer daniel dominique platana, j one eight six one six, is reported missing after air operations overseas july fifteenth stop letter follows."

A follow-up letter dated July 15th from Wing Commander Bingham-Hall Commanding Officer 156 Squadron could only confirm him as "missing."

My mother and grandmother often spoke of the very stressful time after the crash of July 15th because the fact that my father had been killed was at first not able to be confirmed. There was then were a series of letters from the casualty office which at first indicated that he may have been alive and a Prisoner of War because of a possibility of mistaken spelling of names in details coming out of France. Both my mother and grandmother spoke of the great anxiety as they waited several months until they finally received a telegraph dated April 30, 1945 from the RCAF Casualties Officer:

"deeply regret to advise that your son flying officer daniel dominique platana previously reported missing is now reported killed his grave is found in cemetery at ancerville france stop letter follows giving all available details"



These letters have always for me been a source of sadness as I think not only of the reaction of my mother and my father's family after waiting in hope for so long, but because it has always made me contemplate that there were thousands of families who received the same or similar letters notifying them of the loss of their loved one – and I think often that at age 21 my father was the second youngest of his crew. The oldest was 26!

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CLASS OF SERVICE	SYMBOL
Full-Rate Message	
Day Letter	D L
Night Message	N M
Night Letter	N L

If none of these three symbols appears after the check (number of words) this is a full-rate message. Otherwise its character is indicated by the symbol appearing after the check.

32YV 32 GB 2 EXA RCAF

STANDARD TIME

OTTAWA ONT JULY 1221P JULY 16

ANTOINE PLATANA

178

REPORT DELIVERY 2357 HAMILTON ST REGINA SASK

M9365 REGRET TO ADVISE THAT YOUR SON FLYING OFFICER DANIEL
DOMINIQUE PLATANA J ONE EIGHT SIX ONE SIX IS REPORTED
MISSING AFTER AIR OPERATIONS OVERSEAS JULY FIFTEENTH STOP
LETTER FOLLOWS

RCAF CASUALTY OFFICER

1055A



CANADIAN PACIFIC TELEGRAPHS

World Wide Communications

C.D. 18

W.D. NEIL, GENERAL MANAGER OF COMMUNICATIONS, MONTREAL

WNA559 44/43 2 EX GB REPORT DELIVERY

1945 APR 30 PM 8:58

RCAF OTTAWA ONT 30 1028P

MISTER ANTOINE PLATANA

424

2357 HAMILTON ST REGINA

M9535 DEEPLY REGRET TO ADVISE THAT YOUR SON FLYING OFFICER DANIEL
DOMINIQUE PLATANA PREVIOUSLY REPORTED MISSING IS NOW REPORTED
KILLED HIS GRAVE FOUND IN CEMETERY AT ANCERVILLE FRANCE STOP PLEASE
ACCEPT MY PROFOUND SYMPATHY STOP LETTER FOLLOWS GIVING ALL AVAILABLE
DETAILS

RCAF CASUALTIES OFFICER

2357 Hamilton Street,
Regina, Saskatchewan,
May 19th. 1946.

The Secretary,
Department of National Defence for Air,
O T T A W A, Ontario.

Dear Sir:

Please accept my apologies for the delay in answering your letter of the 3rd. of May regarding an investigation of the accident in which my husband F/O, D. D. Platana was involved.

Unfortunately the letter which you request from Mr. Dumont of Ancerville, Meuse is not to hand at the moment. A friend of ours, now on his way to France, offered to go and see Mr. Dumont and get all the information he could and so I gave him the letter for reference.

However, I still have the map which was sent and the 2nd. letter, both of which I am enclosing and I do sincerely hope that the following information will help you in any investigation you may make.

In the letter from A.M.(Overseas) informing me of my husband's death was enclosed the name of Mr. Dumont, keeper of the forest in which the plane crashed. Mrs. Robinson, wife of W/Op. wrote to the Mayor of Ancerville, enclosing a letter for Mr. Dumont. He replied, telling her that 5 of the crew including my husband F/O. Platana, were found that night and the 6th. body F/O. Debrock - 9 months later.

Following this Mrs. Robinson received a letter from the Mayor's Secretary - Therese Claude telling her that 4 bodies were found the morning of the 15th. and later Debrock and Platana. Approximately six weeks later I myself wrote to Dumont and received this reply.

"On the morning of the 15th. of July at about 2 A.M. an R.A. F. Lancaster, returning from a bombing mission over Germany was attacked by a German Night Fighter and crashed and exploded in the forest of Ualturmont - Jossilliers of which I am the keeper. I was not able to reach the scene of the crash until the early hours of the morning and as far as I can remember this is a description of the sad scene.

(The following I cannot remember word for word, but in my own words here is what he went on to say.)

The plane had exploded in mid air and came down in 2 pieces, the engine was separated from the fuselage at a distance of about 300 yards. The bodies of Lockwood, Robinson, and Holbrook were almost on top of each other and a little distance away lay the body of Coker. In the fuselage of the plane lay a body, too badly burned to be identified and there were no effects whatsoever from this body. We still do not know the name of the burned body by I do know for sure that two baled out. One of them took refuge in an isolated farm - was given help, the other landed with an injury to the knee of the ankle and was captured and taken prisoner by the Germans.

I do not know the names of these airmen (he says) but I sincerely hope that your husband may be one of them. I am enclosing a map of the Scene of the crash.

That is the contents of his letter, yet six weeks previous to all this he told the Wireless Operators wife Mrs. Robinson that Platana was one of the bodies found the night of the crash. Following this the Pilot, S/Ldr. Geoffrey Davies, D. S. O. returned from a Prisoner of War Camp and Mrs. Robinson went to see him. He couldn't tell her anything at all about her husband, the only one he knew anything about was my husband. Immediately after giving the command to abandon the plane he received the reply, "O.K. Skip, going now" from my husband. From the others he heard nothing, and after making a vain attempt to reach them, was thrown out himself as the plane exploded. (This was told to Mrs. Robinson, not to me.)

Then without contacting Mr. Dumont at all, I received a second letter, this I am enclosing along with the map. The thing that puzzles me is, how did the burned body happen to be still in the plane, if it exploded and threw out the pilot? How could the body burn completely beyond recognition when they wear asbestos? Where are my husband's discs and all his effects such as ring, pictures, wallet, cigarette case?

Also, I was told by A.M.(Overseas) that they were buried immediately by the French people to avoid falling into the hands of the Germans. F/Lt. Stevens, the other Prisoner of War returned and told us they were given a full Military Funeral by the Germans, four days later. He was in hiding in the district. Then Mrs. Robinson received a letter from the Federation of Graves asking her what she would like inscribed on the cross on her husband's grave and they said they were buried on the 24th. of July, nine days later.

You will gather Sir from this, that both my Mother-in-law and myself are very confused and mystified by all these contradictory reports. I sincerely hope that you will be able to settle our doubts, one way or the other.!

We are trying to contact our friend who holds the original letter but in the case you might be able to get in touch with more quickly I will enclose the address. He left Canada for France on May 12th.

Monsieur. Real Champoux,
Massey-Harris Company Limited,
Canadian Embassy,
PARIS, France.

Trusting this information will prove of assistance to you,
I remain.

Yours sincerely,

DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS

On November 7, 1949 at Government House in Ottawa my mother, grandmother and I accepted the Distinguished Flying Cross from the Governor-General. The commendation on the DFC reads:

Flying Officer Platana, as air gunner, has completed numerous operations against the enemy in the course of which he has invariably displayed the utmost fortitude, courage and devotion to duty.





Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC)

Context

This award was established on 03 June 1918.

Eligibility and criteria

The cross is awarded to officers and Warrant Officers for an act or acts of valour, courage or devotion to duty performed whilst flying in active operations against the enemy.

Description

A cross flory, 2.125 inches wide, with the horizontal and base bars terminated with bumps, the upper bar with a rose. For mounting, the straight bar has two sprigs of laurel at the bottom which form a slot for a king ring to attach it to the small ring at the top of the medal. On the obverse, airplane propellers are superimposed upon the vertical arms of the cross. Within a central winged roundel which is encircled by a wreath of laurels and surmounted by an Imperial Crown, appear the letters RAF. The wings of the roundel fall upon the horizontal arms of the cross. On the reverse, in the central circle the Royal Cypher (GV, GVI, EIIR) appears above the date. The year of issue is engraved on the lower arm. The ribbon is 1.25 inches wide, and consists of alternating violet and white stripes (0.125 wide) leaning to the left at 45 degrees from the vertical. The violet colour is to appear in the bottom left and upper right corners when viewed on the wearer's chest. Until 1919, the stripes were horizontal.



Mrs. Sarah Platana, son Terrence and Mother-in-Law Mrs. A (Martha) Platana at Government House Ottawa after ceremony to accept Distinguished Flying Cross. November 7, 1949.



THE SILVER CROSS

I began this project with a view to putting together the information I have gathered over the years as letters, pictures, memorabilia and information I had saved. In doing so, I reviewed and remembered many incidences where my emotions intensified and many times manifested by tears. Over the years, in going through different times in my life, the thoughts of what his life might have been seemed to give me a new and particularly intense emotional relationship to the father I never knew. Remembrance Day in particular over the years has meant days of sadness and yet pride. During my 17 year career as a lawyer and 28 as a judge, I have not worked on Remembrance Day. I have at times stood at a cenotaph, in an armoury, in good weather, or in wintery cold and snow. I have at times stood alone and at times with the people I love next to me. There are, I must admit, times when I have watched the ceremonies on television, not because of weather, but because I so much appreciate seeing the service at the National War Memorial, and particularly watching the Parade of Veterans. It is that time when my thoughts turn to what might have been if I were seeing my father marching proudly with his medals on his chest, instead of them being proudly in the frame on my wall.

Each Remembrance Day has had special significance for me, the most special when my family are next to me. My wife Madeleine has always given her support, and seems to know just when I need to stand alone or when I need to feel her hand reach into mine.

I remember vividly the first time I stood at the cenotaph in Thunder Bay with my two oldest grandchildren at my side – Sarah Catherine and Jacob Daniel. There I stood honouring those who had given their lives for our country, and thinking so proudly of these young 3 year-olds next to me bearing the names of my parents.

As much as Remembrance Day has always been an important and emotional day for me, over the past several years, with Madeleine, I have experienced people and places that have touched me deeply and, in different ways, have added to my mental picture of who my father was and what his life was like.

Each year on November 11th at memorial ceremonies across the country a special moment occurs when a mother of a deceased serviceman is selected as the Silver Cross Mother to lay a wreath as a representative for all mothers who lost sons during war. My grandmother spoke of having been selected as the Silver Cross Mother to lay the wreath at the cenotaph in Regina. I have included these newspaper accounts as for me they give life to the experience of so many mothers who received the news of the death of their sons and reminds me of the number of times I stood with my grandmother at the cenotaph in Regina on Remembrance Day.

Silver cross mother remembers the agony of waiting for news

July 15, 1944, was a sunny Sunday in Regina — a day Mrs. M. M. Platana will never forget.

That Sunday afternoon, Mrs. Platana was visited by her priest and told her son was missing and presumed dead in action overseas.

Flying Officer Daniel D. Platana was almost 22 years old when his Lancaster bomber, part of the Pathfinder Squadron, went down in eastern France.

The young tail-gunner wasn't supposed to be on the mission which proved to be his last — he was filling in for another airman.

Daniel was supposed to be preparing for the trip home promised every airman after completing an operations tour with the squadron.

It wasn't until March, 1945, that the Platanas received confirmation of their son's death. They had waited for eight months for the letter which was delivered by a Regina policeman — the telegram delivery boys had long since refused to carry that type of message.

Mothers and wives all over Canada have faced Mrs. Platana's wait to receive the same news.

Mrs. Platana, who lives at 4029 Retalack St., says the months which she and thousands of other women waited, darning to hope for a miracle, are the cruelest thing there is.

Mrs. Platana's husband, Antoine, died in 1969 from the ill health which had haunted him since his exposure to gas

during the First World War.

A veteran of the first and second world wars, Antoine Platana served with the 28th Battalion, which later became the Regina Rifle Regiment, during the First World War and with the Veteran's Guard of Canada during the Second World War.

Mrs. Platana is president of the Queen City Chapter of the Silver Cross Women, a part of the Canadian Remembrance Association.

Silver crosses are presented to the next-of-kin of Canadian servicemen who died during the two world wars. They are also presented for those who have since died because of injuries suffered during war service.

Mrs. Platana has two of the thousands of silver crosses which have been presented. On Saturday, she will lay a wreath at the Regina Armory on behalf of Regina-area Silver Cross recipients.

"Many people think Silver Cross recipients are only the mothers of those who fell, but this isn't true. Certainly, most recipients have been mothers, but a sister, brother or father can also receive the Silver Cross if he or she is the next-of-kin. Wives also receive the medal," Mrs. Platana said.

Mrs. Platana stressed she will act in honor of all next-of-kin when she lays the wreath on Remembrance day — for mothers, wives, fathers, brothers and sisters — for all recipients of the Silver Cross.

Daniel Platana, DFC, was remem-



Mrs. M. M. Platana

bered by the government of Saskatchewan. In January, 1946, a lake in the La Ronge area was named in his memory.

I noted one significant incorrect detail in the newspaper account. It is stated that my father was not supposed to be on that trip and was filling in for another airman. In fact, he was killed while flying with his own regular crew captained by S/L Davies. He was however nearing the end of his second tour and I am sure would have been making preparations to return home.

Remembrance services held at two locations

By Michele Young
of The Leader-Post

A soft, light snow fell on the crowd paying tribute to those who served or died in the two world wars during Remembrance Day ceremonies at the cenotaph in Victoria Park Monday.

Ken Powers, minister of Heritage United Church in Regina, led prayers then talked about a war veteran he knew — his father.

He said his father, who is almost 92, has trouble recalling some experiences. But he remembers his war stories "in great detail," Powers said.

The elder Powers has no difficulty reflecting on his involvement at Vimy Ridge and the significance of that battle, he said. But now, he continued, his father has "a yearning of never again."

A Remembrance Day service was also held at the Regina Armoury, attended by about 1,000 people.

At the cenotaph, while a trumpet played, the dull thunder of an artillery salute echoed in the overcast sky. Wreaths were laid, one by one, at the base of the cenotaph.

During the ritual, a veteran commented he'd enjoyed military life more than life as a civilian. "There's a need to remember," another woman said.

One of the first wreaths was set down by this year's Silver Cross Mother, Martha Platana. She lost her 21-year-old son, Daniel, in the Second World War.

Reluctantly, she talked about her son in an interview after the ceremonies. "A mother cannot forget," she said.

Platana has two other sons and one daughter, who were too young to enlist for the war. She said Daniel would have stayed home if she had asked him to, but she didn't want to hold him back.

Daniel joined the air force in 1941 and was sent overseas a year later. He did some service in Africa and

received a Distinguished Flying Cross during his duty. He was reported missing for eight months before he was declared dead in 1944, his mother said.

Platana said he was buried in Ancerville, France. She visited the grave with her husband in 1964 and by herself in 1973.

"In a way, you want to forget — but you don't. You can't forget."

Remembrance Day should be respected by everyone, she said. If we forget, she continued, then everything — the fighting, the loss of lives, the pain of the families — was in vain.



RAF UPWOOD

In September 1978 Madeleine and I travelled to England. Prior to leaving I had written to the records section of the RAF to determine if RAF Upwood was still active. I received a reply from the Base Commander who arranged to meet us. We arrived at Upwood Thursday September 7 and were met at the gate by the Base Commander. He explained that Upwood was not much used anymore except for lodging and offices – a surplus base of RAF Brampton and RAF Wyton.



The Captain showed us around the base which still had some of the old buildings from 1944 when my father was stationed there. At one point we were in his car and he drove onto the runway which was still used periodically. I can still feel my reaction as we drove down the runway I can still remember my heart racing.. I remember my thoughts that no one in their aircraft that night expected anything other than to complete their "Op" and then return. I tried to imagine what it must have been like for each crew member each time the aircraft rolled down that same runway anticipating that they would a few hours later touch it again. I recall my emotions realizing that it was on this runway that my father had touched the earth alive for the last time.

Madeleine wrote in notes she wrote after about how we talked about the fact "that was the runway from where the plane had taken off the night it did not return." She wrote "It was a very hard moment for Terry knowing

that his father had spent many hours here years ago. We thanked the Captain and as we left we both had tears streaming down our eyes. We talked about those times and how hard it would have been for young men of 21 or so years to take off from there wondering if they would ever return. Although it was hard emotionally to be there, we were glad we went. I'm sure if Danny were here he would have wanted to show us where he flew from, just like any father would want to show his son. We expressed a wish that Sadie would never go to Upwood. We wiped our tears and tried to comfort each other." My mother never did return to Upwood.

We drove out of the base and remarked at the beauty of the countryside with open fields and peaceful surrounding. Years later we found out that the land is now all housing and that RAF Upwood no longer exists.



In the course of my search in the 1980's to find someone who might have known my father, I was contacted by a woman in England who was the daughter of F/O Robinson, the Australian also killed in the crash. I had earlier sent her a letter beginning with "we have never met...". In reply she sent me a letter by saying "Before I begin with any of my experiences I need to make a correction to the first line of your letter. We certainly have met; in fact, we spent many hours together on my grandparent's farm. Your mother and you were regular visitors to The Grange in North Yorkshire. Admittedly our conversation would have had a limited vocabulary, but nevertheless, we have met. We both then would have been 11 months old!"

V-E DAY 50TH ANNIVERSARY

May 8, 1995 was the 50th anniversary of V-E Day, which celebrated the end of the Second World War. I was in Thunder Bay watching the ceremony from London England on television. As I watched the ceremonies unfold, I found myself thinking not only of my father, but also of my mother, who was then living in Winnipeg. As I have done on other occasions, I was writing notes to myself about my thoughts and emotions as the ceremony unfolded. As I was preparing this memorial book, I read again the notes from that day and, using those notes as a basis, I now include my experience of that day in this memorial book.

I awoke at 7:00 a.m. The ceremonies in front of Buckingham Palace were on television. Huge crowds were gathered and the commentator was reflecting on the similarity to the crowds that were seen in pictures from May 8, 1945. As I tried to imagine what it must have been like for the crowds in 1945 and what they might have been feeling, I was thinking of the survivors. At first, I felt anger at the thought that my father could have been one of those standing there.

When I thought of my mother, I began to experience huge guilt feelings, realizing that my mother was alone in Winnipeg, no doubt living through her own memories of that day. At different times in her lifetime, she had spoken of how V-E Day had been a day of mixed emotions for her. She had told me that, although she was happy and danced in the streets because the war was over, she could not fully celebrate, knowing that my father was not there to celebrate with her. She worried about what would become of her and her then 2 month old son.

My thoughts turned to my grandparents. I wondered what might have been going through their minds on V-E Day, and I thought of all the parents, brothers and sisters of those who never returned. When seeing the Queen and the Queen Mother on the balcony of Buckingham Palace, I could not help but reflect on the thousands of mothers who never again had been able to experience the love of their sons and daughters standing beside them.

At some point while watching the ceremonies my initial sadness turned to feelings of joy as I felt my emotions shift from a focus of grief for the dead into joy for the living. I could almost feel my father looking down from heaven on me and hoping that he was proud of me.

Watching the huge crowds join in with Vera Lynn brought me back to thinking of my mother. She had a beautiful voice and often accompanied herself on the piano to sing the wartime songs she loved so much. They were songs that I had heard her sing often while growing up, and while watching the ceremonies, I could easily join in silently to the words of The White Cliffs of Dover, Bless 'em All, Nightingales Sang in Barkley Square and I'll Be Seeing You.

As I watched the people on television celebrating, the cameras focused on some veterans in the crowd, proudly wearing the medals they had fought so hard to earn. I thought of my father's medals which have always occupied a special place on a wall in my home. I heard the musical strains of the RAF Marchpast. Regardless of

the circumstances in which I hear it, it seems to stir in me a sense of victory, pride and celebration. As I listened to the music and watched the marchpast, I wondered how my father and his crew might have felt if they had been alive on V-E Day and had been able to march and celebrate among the many thousands gathered in front of the Palace in a total state of euphoria.

As I watched the ceremonies on television, a young girl in the Women's Royal Air Force was being interviewed. She described how, at first, the mood of the crowd "seemed like a carnival atmosphere ." As the day went on, she could sense the mood changing as people seemed to begin to realize the enormity of that day 50 years ago. She said that a sombre mood seemed to take over, as the crowd reflected on what the country had done and what had been sacrificed by those who had not returned to be able to celebrate.

The television program shifted to a segment which focused on the role of war brides. I again felt a pang of guilt at not being with my mother, one of the forty thousand war brides spoken of by the commentator. He spoke of many of these brave young women who left their birth country on a journey to a new and unfamiliar country and family. I was struck by the commentator's words that "most of the war brides are now widows." The broadcast showed an older newsreel of these women, some with children, arriving on ships in Halifax, then transferring to trains. I reflected that my mother had been one of them. I was raised in Regina, and I noted, for me, a breath-taking moment on the television which showed a woman placing Saskatchewan flags on gravesites saying "Thank you, and God Bless you for what you did."

Romeo Leblanc, Governor General of Canada then spoke. He queried, "What would one of those young men who never returned be today? We will never know the talents that lie buried with those young men!"

The ceremony went on with the moving words of the Act of Remembrance. I knew that as my father was bilingual, he would have felt pride in hearing it read in both languages. While they were being read, the cameras focused on the faces of many veterans in the crowd. My notes read that, "I could see the anguish on their faces, grateful that they were there, but also showed a deep sense of loss for dead comrades who were not."

The Act of Remembrance was followed by one minute of silence. I then watched the flypast which was especially moving for me. I knew that my father had flown in a Bristol Blenheim, but the highlight for me was seeing the Battle of Britain aircraft – Hurricane, Spitfire and, of course, the Lancaster. As I watched the flypast, one aircraft pulled up from the formation in the "missing man" tribute. The words of "Abide with Me" began, a hymn which, for me, instantly stirs up an increased heartbeat. I could feel the intense sadness within me begin to well up. At that moment I felt that tribute was for my father!

As I was reviewing the notes I made in May 1995, I recalled a time around 2008 when as a judge I was sitting in Hamilton, Ontario. I was visiting the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum looking at the Lancaster. I was standing beside the rear gunner turret when an older gentleman came up and said "This was a remarkable airplane. I flew in it." I replied that my father had also, and then I just burst into tears. The elderly man was incredibly understanding, put his hand on my shoulder and said "I take it he didn't come back. You should be very proud." A brick bearing my father's name is now inscribed on the Museum walls.

As I write these words today, I read again my notes that on May 8, 1995, I was feeling great sadness for my

mother. I was thinking of her as a young girl whose parents had died when she was young, to her stories of experiencing rationing and blackouts during the war, losing her husband after just six weeks of marriage, and then leaving England for an unknown life in Canada with a family she had never met. At the same time, I felt overwhelming love and admiration for her, and a renewed sense of gratitude for the life I have had as a result of her decision to come to Canada.

My notes tell me that I then just burst out crying, all alone in the apartment. I immediately phoned her! We both cried! I told her that I just wanted to let her know that I was thinking of her, how much I loved her and that I was sorry for not being there with her. My mother had a deep faith and she told me that she always thought that when God took my father away from her, He gave me to her. She went on to say how proud she was of me and how much she loved my wife Madeleine and our twin daughters. My mother was beginning to show signs of older age. Through her tears she said how much she appreciated what Madeleine was doing to help her.

At 8:25 that evening I wrote "Didn't get much work done today, but this seemed to be so much more important."

PLATANA LAKE

After the War the Saskatchewan Government established a geo-memorial project wherein they dedicated and named nearly 3,700 geographic features in honour of servicemen from Saskatchewan who gave their lives in World War II. I had always known that one such feature was Platana Lake in the Lac La Ronge area of Northern Saskatchewan and had often hoped that one day I could go there.

In 1998 I became aware of a man named Doug Chisholm. In a remarkably personal and unselfish way Doug, who then lived in Lac La Ronge, moved by the story of one woman, began a project that resulted in taking aerial photos of over 3000 of these geographical features.

In summer of 1999 Madeleine and I made contact with Doug. We traveled to La Ronge and flew with Doug in his floatplane to Platana Lake. My feelings were intense as we approached the lake and circled around to land. The video taken by Madeleine as we touched down on glassy water contains Doug's words that I will never forget - " Welcome to Platana Lake." In a perhaps strange, but very real way to me, I recall through my tears having thoughts of my father in his aircraft touching down at Upwood after a long mission in the Lancaster.



We stopped at a small cabin on the shore, where there was a native family in their summer fishing camp, and borrowed a small boat. We traveled a short distance and stopped at a point on the rocky shoreline. We walked up on the rocks to a place where there was a small level area with a wonderful view of the lake. We sat or stood there together each in our own thoughts. Doug and I began to talk about the incredible sacrifice so many young men from Saskatchewan, and around the world, had made and how senseless war seemed in the peacefulness of the lake view we were looking at. Doug commented that for the ones who came home, "they left as young boys and returned as men, having missed their teenage years!"



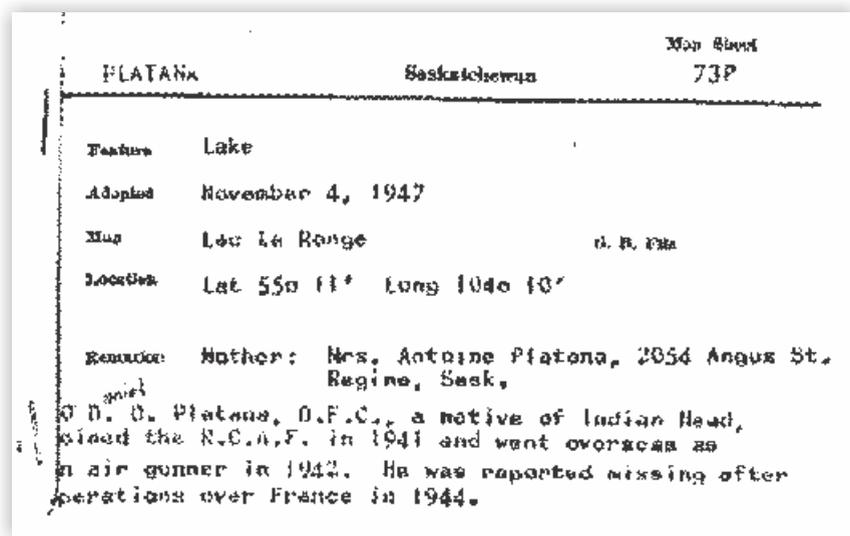
When putting this remembrance together, I reflected on Doug's words that day. I think of my own teenage years as an Air Cadet in Ottawa. In the early part of this book is a picture of my father at the farm in his uniform prior to embarkation. I was reminded of a picture I have of me in my Air Cadet uniform. I recall always feeling very proud when wearing my uniform, particularly when I attended the Senior Leaders Course in 1961 and earned the title of Top Air Cadet in Canada. I have always had a very strong interest in flying and the Air Force. When I look at that picture I can only hope that, in looking down from where I believe him to be, he is as proud of me as I have always been of him.

I appreciated even more than before how important this project was for Doug and gave thanks for the opportunity he had given me to stand on that piece of land and see water named after my father, bearing my family name. The three of us stood together and I recall Madeleine and I offering a prayer of thanksgiving, for a life sacrificed, and a life given to us.

The significance of Platana Lake took on a new meaning for our family. Before leaving, we took a bottle of water from the lake. On return home, the water was frozen. As a Permanent Deacon in the Roman Catholic Church, I have the privilege of administering the Sacrament of Baptism. Beginning with the first of five, all of our grandchildren have been baptized with water from Platana lake. I have used the same water to bless the rings at the weddings of my twin daughters.

Following our trip to Platana Lake we made arrangements through Doug to have a bronze plaque made which he later affixed to a rock on the shoreline as a lasting symbol of remembrance. The video Doug made at the time to me as much as anything speaks of this wonderful man who has done so much to honour the lives of young men who never had the opportunity to live out their lives in the Province they called home. After preparing the location, Doug carefully rinsed the plaque in the water and then, with what seemed to be almost a reverence, affixed it to the rock. The first time I watched the video seeing Doug attaching the plaque in some different way seemed to represent my father's final return home! I had a strange sense that somehow he no longer had a final resting place only in Ancerville, but he has returned to the province, to the family to which he had always hoped to return.

Doug has had published two books honouring these men's lives, both of which have a prominent place in our bookcase and which I have read frequently, "Their Names Live On" and "Age Shall not Weary Them." In 2006, I had the honour of travelling to Regina for the launch of "Their Names Live On" and speaking as a representative of the families whose loved ones lives are recorded in the book. I recall speaking to some of the family members of those honoured in the book who were present. I cannot recall the words, often spoken through tears; however, I remember the words of gratitude expressed by so many at the great contribution made by Doug and the others involved in the publication. They contributed so much to the memories of those whose lives in Saskatchewan were cut so short, and who certainly would have contributed so much.





ANCERVILLE, FRANCE 1998

Prior to her death, my mother suffered from dementia, however, she spoke more than before about her life with my father during the short time they were together. She expressed a strong desire that when she died she wanted to be buried in France with him. I later wrote "Reflections of Ancerville" written at the time of the burial of my mother's ashes in the same grave as my father.

Reflections of Ancerville

by Terrence Platana

I began these reflections on November 11, 1997, Remembrance Day, a day which has always been of particular significance to me, and never more so than this year. The past significance has always been the reminder of the father I never knew, a 21-year old RCAF Air Gunner who lost his life over France on July 14th, 1944 while serving with 156 Squadron RAF Pathfinder Group. He is buried along with four of his crew of Lancaster PA984 in the communal cemetery in the small French community of Ancerville.

I had been waiting for some time to write this story and could never find the right way to begin. I thought I might begin by talking about how when my grandmother died, I received her collection of letters, every one my father had written from the time he had enlisted in 1941 to his death in 1944. I thought about beginning with his letters home to his parents telling them about the wonderful young WRAF he had met. Then I thought I might begin by the entry in his well-worn small pocket diary with the entry on December 12, 1943 "Met Sadie Sharpe. A swell kid. Bags of fun.", or the entry on June 5, 1944, "Got married in Felling. Happiest man in the world." I looked through his log books and thought of beginning with the last entry on July 14, 1944, "Operations over Revigny. Failed to return". I thought also of beginning with the all too familiar letters to my mother and my grandparents advising them that my father was missing. I thought of beginning with the search I started in 1980 trying to find someone who might have known him during the years he served with 425 Alouette Squadron in Italy, North Africa, and Dishforth in England, or for someone who might have had any contact with him during the time he served with Pathfinder Force as part of 156 Squadron RAF. There seemed to be so many ways to start this story that I just kept putting it off waiting for just the right way and time. Remembrance Day reminded that there is rarely, if ever, just the right way or time for some things.

Following the War, my mother and I came to Regina, Saskatchewan to live with my father's family. From my arrival here as an 11 month old in February 1946 and our becoming part of a new family, Remembrance Day became a regular and anticipated part of my life each year. I remember the early years, watching my grandfather proudly marching in the Parade of Veterans, displaying the medals he had earned in the First World War. I remember the services at the cenotaph in Victoria Park which we always attended whether the temperature was like late fall or early winter. I remember the

day spent at the special Remembrance Day and veterans events at the Legion in Regina. I remember the first time my grandmother, proudly but apprehensively, laid her wreath as the Silver Cross mother. The newspaper in a story just prior to that Remembrance Day reported the following;

July 15, 1944 was a sunny day in Regina - a day Mrs. M.M. Platana will never forget. That Sunday afternoon, Mrs. Platana was visited by her priest and told her son was missing and presumed dead in action overseas. Flying Officer Daniel D. Platana was almost 22 years old when his Lancaster bomber, part of the Pathfinder squadron, went down in eastern France. The young tail-gunner wasn't supposed to be on the mission, which proved to be his last - he was filling in for another airman. Daniel was supposed to be preparing for the trip home promised every airman after completing an operations tour with the squadron. It wasn't until March 1945 that the Platanas received confirmation of their son's death. They had waited for eight months for the letter which was delivered by a Regina policeman - the telegram delivery boys had long since refused to carry that type of message. Mothers and wives all over Canada have faced Mrs. Platana's wait to receive the same news.

The article went on to describe the significance of the Silver Cross and then concluded with something I think of each year as I watch the Silver Cross representative laying the wreath.

Mrs. Platana stressed she will act in honour of all next-of-kin when she lays the wreath on Remembrance Day - for mothers, wives, fathers, brothers and sisters - for all recipients of the Silver Cross

Each year on November 11th, when I watch the news on television, I see new and unfamiliar faces, and yet, at the same time, they are faces I have seen before. I see the aged faces of the veterans proudly standing and marching by, but I see the face of my grandfather, who died in 1969 having served in two World Wars. I see the faces of the Silver Cross mothers, but I see the face of my grandmother, dead seven years but still very much a part of my memories. I see the faces of young Officer Cadets from the military colleges and I am reminded that my father and his crewmates were their age when they died. I am reminded of my days standing as an Air Cadet at the National War Memorial in Ottawa.

I think of the emotions I have experienced over the years as I wait, in anticipation and at the same time with great sadness welling up inside, for the trumpeter to begin the Last Post and then Reveille. I think of the time each year when my heart begins to beat faster as I hear the words "We will remember them". And I think of the time I dread, and yet love the most, when I simply cannot avoid the tears as the music begins "Abide With Me."

Remembrance Day over the past fifty-two years of my life has brought me some of my most painful memories, and at the same time memories of immense gratitude and appreciation for those who gave so much. Remembrance Day 1997, more than any in the past, was a day of memories for me. It was a day not so much of memories long ago, but of very recent memories of August 20th, 1997, the day we buried my mother's ashes in my father's plot in Ancerville., France.

My special story of my memories of this past Remembrance Day are tied to March 1996, when my mother died. In her last years, my mother suffered from Alzheimers Disease and had little short-term memory, but she did have some wonderful memories of her younger years, and in particular, of the brief time while married to my father. She spoke more than ever of the father I had never known and who had never even known that she was pregnant.

There are far too many of her memories to write about here but I was reminded watching the Remembrance Day veterans of the many times my mother told me of her feelings after the war. She was so much afraid about making the decision to leave England and go to a country so strange to her where her only contact had been the family of the husband now gone. She had only a brother and an aunt left in England, but at least she knew them. She spoke to me of her memories of crossing the Atlantic and our arrival in Halifax February 14th 1946. She spoke of the long train ride from there to Regina, wondering who and what was awaiting her, worried because I had a terrible cough and she was afraid they would ask us to get off the train so I wouldn't infect the others. Most particularly, she spoke of arriving at the station in Regina, standing on the platform, and finding no one there. She said she waited for a long time - which I now know was less than a minute - feeling totally bewildered and alone, holding an eleven month old baby in her arms. Her next memory is one, which she carried with her all her life. As she described it, "All of a sudden someone grabbed my baby out of my arms. I began screaming 'My baby, my baby, someone took my baby' and then I heard a soft voice which I later learned to love, 'it's all right my dear, you're with us now'". That was my mother's introduction to my grandfather and to her new Canadian family. My grandparents and my aunt and uncles were there, waiting for the young woman and child they would recognize only by the coat, hat and scarf they had sent over for me to wear. She described that moment as one of the most frightening and yet the happiest she had ever experienced.

In her later years, as she realized she was becoming less aware of things, she spoke of her wishes that upon her death she would be cremated and her ashes taken to France. Our family initially had some hesitation. However, we ultimately decided that it was important to respect her wishes. After her death, I contacted the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in Ottawa. They were extremely helpful and, after getting the necessary approvals from the Government of France, we made plans to travel to Ancerville and to bury her ashes in the same plot as my father.

So began my journey with my wife Madeleine to Ancerville, France in August 1997. My grandmother had for years before her death had been corresponding with a distant cousin in France, Suzanne Chanal. My aunt had continued the relationship after my grandmother's death and had told Suzanne in a letter of our intentions. Very shortly after that I received a letter from Madame Chanal asking if she could be of any help in arranging for the burial. After an exchange of letters and phone calls, my wife and I left for France anticipating attending a small memorial Mass followed by the interment of the ashes.

I must make some small, but necessary digressions here. The story of the involvement of Suzanne and Pierre Chanal is really a story in itself. In correspondence with my grandmother years ago, she had learned that my father was buried in France, coincidentally near to where she and her husband, Pierre, a retired officer in the French Army, lived. However, they had forgotten the exact name of the village, remembering only that it ended in "ville", which, in France, led to many possibilities. One day, while returning from a trip to Germany to their home in Troyes, France, on the road they had taken many times before, they passed through Ancerville. Purely on the spur of the moment, they went into the town and found the cemetery. They found an elderly couple in the cemetery and asked them if they

knew if there were any Allied airmen buried there. It turned out that the couple in the cemetery were among the first on the scene the night the plane had crashed in July 1944. That couple immediately took them to the military plot where the five are buried. (The crew that night consisted of eight: five from the RAF, one from the RAAF, one from Belgium, and my father from the RCAF. Two survived and escaped. The remaining crewman was not found until March 1945. He was then buried in Ancerville but later the body was exhumed and returned to Belgium for burial.) In speaking with the elderly couple at the cemetery, the Chanals learned that there had been a special ceremony just two weeks previous in the adjoining district honouring airmen shot down during the War and that there had been a newspaper article about that event.

The newspaper story put Suzanne in touch with M. Jean-Marie Chirol. M. Chirol is the President of an Association in France called "Club Memoires 52." founded in 1991 to honour certain historical events in the Department of the Haute-Marne, which is immediately adjacent to Ancerville. Part of their historical research was about aircraft which had been shot down in that region during the War, which included Wellington X.3763 of 425 Alouette Squadron shot down on April 15, 1943. M. Chirol is a member of 425 Alouette Squadron Association.

These two digressions will put a perspective on what came next. My wife and I arrived in Zurich on Wednesday August 20th and immediately drove to Suzanne and Pierre's home in Troyes, France. That evening we began to appreciate the immense effort they had put into making the burial truly a memorable day for us. Suzanne had contacted my grandmother's cousin and his wife who travelled from Paris to Troyes to be at Ancerville the next day.

Thursday morning we travelled from Troyes to Ancerville for the memorial mass at 10:00 a.m.. As we came very near to Ancerville, we saw a car parked at the side of the road with a man standing there holding a Canadian flag, and so we met M. Chirol.

We continued into Ancerville. At this point, my wife and I were still expecting a small mass followed by a quiet burial ceremony. We arrived at Ancerville and met Father Roland Adnot, the parish priest, whose hospitality was immediate and a forecast of what was to come. He gave us a tour of the magnificent old church built in the 1100's, and now declared an historical monument in France. After freshening up at the parish rectory, we went back to the church. I was very quickly stunned. M. Chirol had prepared a large poster which was hanging just above the altar in the church. On it was a large picture of my father, with badges of 425 Alouette Squadron, Pathfinder Group and two roundels with a maple leaf in the centre. Inscribed on the poster were the words (in French) "In your goodness Lord welcome Sarah into this ground of Ancerville, where her husband Daniel has been buried since July 1944." My heart stopped momentarily as I was not aware that anyone there had ever seen a picture of my father. I subsequently learned that my aunt had sent one over. I had brought my parents wedding picture from 1944 so that the people could see what my parents looked like. That picture was sitting on a small table at the front of the altar along with the urn containing my mother's ashes.

We were overwhelmed when we walked into the church where there was a large crowd of people present. Among them were M. Yvon Vannerot, the Mayor of Ancerville, and his wife Renee, representatives of French Veterans Associations, a choir, and three Officers from the French airbase

situate at nearby St. Dizier, coincidentally the same base where the German night-fighter had taken off from the night it shot down my father's Lancaster. Suzanne had told Father Adnot that I am a Permanent Deacon in the Catholic Church and so he asked me if I would like to celebrate the mass with him. I knew that it was going to be a difficult time for me and really wanted to just sit there with Madeleine, so I declined. He asked me if I would simply wear vestments and read the Gospel at the appropriate time. It seemed to be important to him that I take part in some way and so I had my first experience as a Deacon reading the gospel in French. Just prior to the commencement of the mass, the Mayor's wife came to the front of the church and read a short announcement of the significance of the mass. I was very moved as she explained that we were there not only to celebrate the life and death of my mother, but also that of my father and his crewmates who had given their lives and were buried in Ancerville.

Father Adnot's words in the homily moved me deeply. Suzanne had earlier asked me to send some information about my mother which she had passed on to him. I cried as I heard him tell about the love shared so briefly between my parents, married six short weeks before she became a widow, not even then knowing that she was already pregnant with me. He spoke of the sacrifice made by my father, of those buried in their cemetery with him, and the sacrifice made by all those who had given their lives for the freedom and liberation of France.

I thought as we approached the end of the mass that I had experienced all that I could. I was feeling gratitude beyond belief for these people. I was definitely not prepared for what happened next! As the people in the church filed out at the end of the mass, each person in turn came to the small table, which had the ashes on it and blessed the urn with holy water. The last to do so were the three French Air Force officers, who, after blessing the ashes, turned to me and came to attention. I was very moved by that! I felt deeply honoured, yet at the same time very humble. I appreciated the gesture and yet I knew that it was not for me, but for my father and his comrades, and for my mother and those like her, who had given so very much. I spoke briefly after the mass explaining to the people how the name "Ancerville" had always had such special significance for our family and how we had always felt a special connection to their town. Whenever it was spoken in our family, particularly by my grandmother, we somehow felt that a part of France was made a part of us. It had always been spoken with a kind of reverence for it reminded all of us that there was a part of our family that was no longer with us. I tried to explain to them that for me the name would hereafter have an even greater significance, knowing that both my parents would now have a place in their community.

On leaving the church, Father Adnot asked us to fall in behind the same flag-bearer who had stood beside the altar in the church. A small procession just seemed to form. I followed the flag, carrying the urn, and all the people who had been at the church followed after. As we walked through the town square and the few blocks to the cemetery, people came out of their stores and homes and stood in their doorways. Madeleine told me later that as she was walking with Fr. Adnot she was saying how we were so very grateful for what they were doing for us and how people had not forgotten after fifty-three years. He looked at her and said, "It is we who are grateful. If it had not been for men like these I would not be here today."

We approached the entrance to the cemetery where, on the stone wall surrounding the cemetery, I

immediately noticed the small sign which I had not seen before, "Commonwealth War Graves." On arrival at the cemetery, I had another intense moment. I had been to Ancerville to visit the cemetery three times previously and had seen my father's grave. I was not, however, prepared to see the hole, which had been dug at the foot of the grave to permit the urn containing my mother's ashes to be placed in the same plot. Everyone from the church gathered around the small beautifully kept plot containing the graves of the five airmen. The Mayor read a statement. His words were so deeply moving to me that I translate and reproduce them in full here:

I respectfully welcome the ashes of Mrs. Platana and also the members of her family present here today in our cemetery.

Flying Officer Daniel Platana was a member of the crew of a Lancaster III PA984 of the Royal Air Force which, while taking part in a raid on the train station in Revigny sur Ornain the night of July 14/15th, 1944 was attacked by a German fighter over Ancerville and crashed in the forest of Valtiermont.

By July 15, 1944, the Allied troops had only landed in Normandy 40 days earlier and the battle was still raging. The Germans, surprised by the Allied initiative which they had not been expecting in that region, needed reinforcements of men, materials, ammunition and fuel. It was important for the Allies, helped by the French resistance, to slow down those reinforcements by whatever means. The bombing of supply lines, staging points and bridges was one of these means. The sabotage of roads and the harassment by the resistance was another.

156 Squadron of the RAF took off from its base at Upwood at 2155 hours with its mission to illuminate the target, which consisted of the marshaling yards of Revigny by dropping their marker bombs in preparation for the bombing itself. At 0153 the aircraft had its last communication with the mission chief. At about 2:00 in the morning, the residents of Ancerville heard an aircraft in distress circling lower and lower just outside the village, as though it was looking for a place to land. There was a loud explosion, then nothing.

The Mayor and Councillors, the police, the foresters, and the firemen, surrounded by a detachment of German soldiers, left in the night towards the location of the crash, which was in the vicinity of the branch of the Beau Chene between Ancerville and Sommelonne. Among the debris of the aircraft, which was scattered over a vast perimeter, they discovered the bodies of five Allied airmen.

In spite of the presence of the occupying forces who asked for simple funerals, the whole village accompanied the bodies to the church, then to the cemetery, in a long contemplative procession, in a silent, contemplative manifestation of impressive patriotism, and of dignity, under the watchful eyes of their masters of the moment. The risk was great, because at that time the Germans were harsh and they seemed to enjoy making appalling examples with the goal of terrorizing the population and, so they thought, of paralyzing the French Resistance.

Think, that on June 10, 1944, a company of S.S. en route to the Normandy front had just massacred 642 inhabitants of Oradour sur Glane in the centre of France. Think also, that very close to us, in our region, these same troops were preparing to deport, on July 30, 1944 to be exact, 100 men of Clermont en Argonne of whom only 25 returned from concentration camps, and also to burn the villages of Robert-Espagne and Couvonges in the very near valley of Saulx and to shoot more than 80 men on August 29, 1944.

Among these five Allied heroes solemnly honoured by the entire population of Ancerville in July 1944 was Daniel Platana. At the

beginning of June, he had married a young Englishwoman, Sarah, a clerk in the RAF. In March 1945, Terrence (Terry), son of Daniel and Sarah, was born. Today, at the age of 52, he is a Judge of the Ontario Court of Justice, and he is carrying out the wishes of his mother who wanted, after her death, to rejoin the husband she had known for such a short time.

I thank all those here who, by their presence, today render homage to the memory of the five Allied airmen fallen on our soil for our freedom, and to the remarkable faithfulness to one of them by Mrs. Platana.

We feel somewhat responsible for the misfortune which touched Mr. Terrence Platana, even before his birth. In the name of all the residents of Ancerville, I assure him, and the members of his family, of all our esteem and of our gratitude.

At the conclusion of his speech, he presented me with a brass bookend with the name and crest of Ancerville. I was told that these were produced in very limited numbers and given out only on very special occasions. I knew that I had just received something that I would treasure always. As I stood there still trying to comprehend the significance to me, the villagers began to walk by and offer their sympathies. One elderly couple walked by the grave site. The old man had tears streaming down his face. He looked at me and simply said, "I was there. Thank you." My heart seemed to stop, and once again my tears started to flow freely. What I had in the beginning expected to be a small simple ceremony burying my mother had turned into what was a most difficult and yet incredible day for me. It was a day when I had somehow buried my mother, and yet, at the same time, I seemed to have also buried my father, killed fifty-three years earlier.

Following the burial, we were invited to a small reception at the rectory. There we had another incredible experience when I met two very significant people. One was M. Moreau, now retired, who was thirteen years old the night of the crash and who had been at the site the next day. He then was the altar server at the funeral mass for the five who were buried. He recalled how the priest who celebrated the mass had given him an orange. The other person was Mme. Claude, a lady now in her eighties. She had been the secretary to the Mayor and Council in July 1944. She had made notes of the night of the crash and surrounding events and it was she who had given much of the information to the Mayor which he had given at the cemetery. She gave me a copy of the notes she had made. It was also she who made handkerchiefs from the parachutes found at the crash site and which I had been given by grandmother years ago and still have to this day. The Mayor gave me a copy of the official town records and Fr. Adnot gave me copies of the church records from July 1944. One of the most moving items I received was a picture of the funeral, taken July 17th, 1944.

Later in the afternoon, after lunch, Mayor Vannerot took us out into the forest, a short distance from Ancerville, and showed us the exact location in the forest where the plane had crashed. Madeleine remembers him saying that even though the forest had reclaimed itself, the people still knew where the exact place where my father and his crew ended the seventeenth operational mission of their tour, what for him was his second tour of operations. He and my mother had already been making plans to go to Canada and for her to meet his family. I could not help but think of the other members of the crew, and I wondered what their family story had been! I wondered also how many other sons and daughters of those killed had stood at their graves, or at the places where they had lost their lives. The forest seemed so peaceful that it was difficult to imagine what the early morning hours of July 15th, 1944 were like, nor did I really want to! I said a prayer for my father and his crew, and for their families. It almost seemed

impossible that anything like the Mayor had described could ever have taken place, but I very much knew that it had!

Just prior to leaving Ancerville that day, our hosts took us back to the cemetery and considerately left us to visit the grave alone. It had again been closed. There were huge bouquets from my cousins and from the Mayor and citizens of Ancerville on the site. I had a momentary regret as I looked at the plot knowing that Commonwealth War Graves regulations do not allow any identification of my mother's burial to be placed on the grave, but I almost immediately began to think of the events of the day and how no manner of marking the grave could ever make that day any more significant for me. I was also extremely pleased because the Mayor's wife had earlier told us that every year since 1945, on May 8th and November 11th there is a special ceremony at the gravesite of these airmen, honouring and remembering them. The people place flowers on the graves and say prayers. As the Mayor's wife told us, they will now also be honouring and remembering my mother.

I must again digress for a moment. From the time of our arrival in France, we constantly kept experiencing the most wonderful, caring, remembering people. We had arrived at Ancerville having known Suzanne and Pierre Chanal less than twenty-four hours and already we felt like we were very old friends. Their hospitality, warmth, openness, and obvious genuine excitement at being able to arrange this magnificent ceremony for us had already touched us very deeply. Madeleine and I spoke on our way to Ancerville about how we realized we had truly met some very special people! Our cousins who had traveled from Paris kept me enthralled with stories of years ago when my grandparents had visited France. They recounted stories about a part of my family I had not known before.

M. Chirol was also someone who also made an immediate impression on us. It was almost like listening to history relive itself to hear him speak of the research he had done about his region of France and in particular of his involvement with Club Memoires and 425 Alouette Squadron. He obviously had an intense respect for history and for the memories of 1939-45 and the men who lost their lives liberating France.

Our memories of the people of Ancerville are probably best personified in the persons of Fr. Adnot and Mayor Vannerot and his wife Renee. Their involvement on behalf of the citizens of the town, and on their own behalf, gave us an lasting impression of the nature of those people. The welcome they gave us, the warmth with which they spoke, the pride in their town, and the compassion shown to us on a difficult day is something which we shall never forget. The Mayor's pride in his town and its history was so evident. The personal interest shown to us by the leader of this French community made me somehow feel much more at peace with the decision to bury my mother so far from Canada. It also made me feel in a sense proud knowing that my father and his crewmates were buried in a part of France which was so mindful and so thankful for the actions of those men.

We left Ancerville with an enormous sense of gratitude. We had experienced from the people something which we had never anticipated. The honour they gave us we knew was not because of us. Rather it was their way of expressing thanks and honouring those men and women who had given their lives so that the people of Ancerville and France might today celebrate being free and not living under oppression. One older man perhaps explained it best. I was saying to him that I could not understand

nor could I ever thank the people for what they had done for us that day. He said to me, "Unless you have lived under oppression, you will never know what it is like to experience freedom. It is we who thank you." I knew he was not thanking me. He was rather thanking all those we remember and honour each Remembrance Day, the veterans walking in the parades throughout the country, themselves remembering friends and comrades of years gone by who are no longer here to walk with them. He was thanking those veterans who remember, and those whom they, and we, are remembering.

I recall watching the ceremonies marking the 50th anniversary of D-Day two years ago. I was struck by the reaction of the French people and how after all these years, they still seemed to remember and be so appreciative of what the service men of our country did in securing freedom for them. I could not fully understand then, and I still cannot. I do, however, know and understand that for my wife and I the memories of the people of Ancerville are indelibly engrained in our minds and hearts. They may have been present to thank and honour my parents. In fact, it is we who left with a deep sense of affection and gratitude for these people who helped me live through an experience which 53 years ago I could not; who for 53 years have watched over the graves of those who are now a permanent part of their land; who helped me to understand better that lives were not given in vain.

Remembrance Day has always been the most special day of the year for me and each year I watch the ceremonies at local cenotaphs or from the National War Memorial. God willing, I will one year soon miss celebrating this day in Canada as I have before, because I will be back in Ancerville honouring the memory of my parents and praying for lasting peace that no one anywhere in the world will ever have to honour anyone killed in the future by the horrors of war.

I will remember them!



Graves at Ancerville, June 20, 1998

FRANCE 2002

This part of this memorial book does not directly relate to my father, and I was originally not going to include it, however, it is of particular significance in another way. Standing before my father's grave was a highly emotional experience for me. Standing before the graves of hundreds of thousands and feeling loss and grief for so many was another! It put into perspective in a very real way the magnitude of the number of young men, like my father, who lost their lives before they had a chance to live their childhood dreams. They too should be remembered!

In May 2002 we attended a cultural festival in Langres, France, part of which included a memorial service for Canadian airmen who died in France in that Region. I had been invited as a representative of the families of those airmen. Prior to leaving for France we had decided to visit Normandy. I had seen movies and read books of the events at Normandy on D-Day and, as many others so affected by the events of WWII, very much wanted to visit the area, not just to see, but to show respect for those who lived, and died.

I knew also that my grandfather Antoine Platana had served overseas in WWI and fought at Vimy Ridge in the battle of The Somme. I was aware of its importance to Canadians as I also had an uncle and a great-uncle who had served overseas and had heard them speak of the importance of the battle of Vimy Ridge as a part of Canadian history.

In remembering and honouring my father, I am mindful that, like me, there are hundreds of thousands of sons and daughters of servicemen and women who lost a parent during the two great world wars. I am mindful that many of the children of those who died may never have the opportunity to visit their parent's gravesite, or in fact, of many parents who have never been able to stand in front their child's grave. I have stood at many military gravesites and have tried to imagine what life might have been like for the person buried there and for the family life they never experienced, for the son or daughter they never saw grow up. In my own way, my experiences in this part of this book have given me an opportunity to stand at a gravesite and to momentarily take the place of one of those children, to show respect and to honour their parent on their behalf.

We decided before we began our trip to Langres that we would keep a record of what we were experiencing by using a tape recorder of our experiences. What follows in this part of this book are memories of parts of our trip and our thoughts as we recorded them. Parts of what follows are identified as either Madeleine's or my words spoken at the time and other parts are my thoughts and comments based on the recorded notes. Some parts are a recording of a guide.

We arrived in Paris after having travelled in England. We made our way via Normandy to the north of France to visit Vimy Ridge on our way to Langres.

TERRY: Wednesday evening in Caen, end of the first day of our travels into Normandy. We first began to experience the aspects of the Battle of 1944 into Normandy when we saw a sign at the side of the road indicating "German Military Cemetery". We stopped, and in fact, there were two cemeteries side by side.

One was the allies, primarily British, a few Canadian and some Australian, about 600 graves in that one. And then we went almost immediately adjacent and there was a German cemetery which seemed to be at least four times larger. It was amazing to see that all the allied grave markers were white and all the German grave markers were brown. Obviously, what struck us is that when you looked at the inscriptions on the tombstones it didn't matter whether they were British, Australian, a couple of Canadian or German. They were mainly young kids between the ages of 20 and 26 with some older men.

Today is Thursday. We started our day by going through the Memorial at Caen which was truly a very, very impressive place. The movie that started the day off was incredibly well done, the split screen between what was happening in England for the Allies preparations and what was happening with the Germans preparations at the same time here on the Coast in France. The filming was truly outstanding. It was all live film except for a couple of occasions when they very, very effectively cut from the actual filming along the beach in 1944 to instantly a scene of what the beach is like today, in colour, so calm with just a beautiful sand beach and no fortifications and no people dying.

There were a number of things throughout the film that really struck us. One was looking at the faces of some of the captured German soldiers who were obviously so very young and whose faces just looked as though they were totally hopeless and totally frustrated and beaten. Some of the scenes they had of the destruction were almost too hard to imagine - even seeing them on live pictures it was hard to imagine. Some of the other scenes that really impacted on us were seeing the faces of very young children as the towns they were in were being liberated and as they were being given food by members of the allied forces. The movie overall did a really good job to explain the whole D-Day campaign and when different sections of the campaign started, when it moved in and what was done. At one point in time in the movie there was a scene of almost the entire destruction of a town with the exception of a church, which just stood there.

Outside is the Canadian garden and as you look across a valley you see a section on the riverbank on the other side where there are a number of trees that were planted. It's really impressive to stand there and realize that the garden was dedicated by Canada because all around the Memorial the contribution of Canadians is very much made known.

After we went to the cathedral, we went to another museum commemorating the D-Day landing. It was mainly uniforms, pictures and weapons, although again, it had an interesting film. The films I'm finding are the most interesting part of what you can see, but I really don't like just seeing all the weapons. Again, in this particular film on a couple of occasions you see the faces of children, and you see the faces of young soldiers. It's just absolutely phenomenal. At one point in time you see the face of a Canadian who is guarding a young German soldier, and, so many times throughout the films and the museums, you realize that for every young 21-year old in the Canadian, American or British side that was fighting, there was a 21-year old fighting on the German side.

When we were in the memorial at Caen, one of the things that was incredibly striking was that, in the section dealing with U-boats during the war, there were 40,000 men that served in the German submarine service, 30,000 of were killed and 5000 were captured, so that only 5,000 ever survived.

At this moment, we are standing on Omaha Beach, looking up at the monument and looking down the vast

expanse of the beach. It's absolutely incredible when you look at it. The beach is as beautiful itself as the one we had in the Dominican Republic. It just seems to go miles in either direction. I'm looking at what I think are the cliffs of Point DuHoc on the far end of the beach where it just goes straight up. It's just very difficult to comprehend 150,000 young men landing on landing boats in this area, running up this beach full of obstacles, looking at the hills which are just up behind which probably were full of German troops, gun emplacements and weapons just blazing away. It seems to just be draining when you think of the number of lives that were given on this beach of young kids that were 20-21 years old. Just wandering around looking at both ends of this beach, it's difficult to comprehend. If there had never been movies made about what actually took place on this beach over 50 years ago my mind would have probably never allowed me to comprehend that there could be such horror in this particular place because it's now so beautiful. And as Madeleine just said, wondering what it must be like for perhaps someone who is the son or daughter of somebody who was killed on this beach bringing his or her own children to walk along it and wondering about the sacrifice that their fathers or their grandfathers made so that we can now walk on this beach and enjoy it peacefully.

We're now at Point DuHoc, which was the first place that the Allies actually landed on the beach. It's just amazing as you walk around. The ground is still littered with craters from the bombs and some of the old fortifications, gun emplacements and concrete bunkers are still in place. You see people walking around, obviously many of them seeming to be just with their own thoughts. The cliffs here are absolutely phenomenal. Where I am standing now would seem to be maybe about 100 feet straight up from water's edge. You can see barbed wire fence that is still left here that is all rusted so that when the Allied forces reached the top of the cliff, they still had to get through the barbed wire and then through the gun emplacements. It's just hard to comprehend how they could possibly have done it.

I'm standing now just at the entrance to the German cemetery at LaCombe, and it's written in here, "With its melancholy rigor it is a graveyard for soldiers not all of whom had chosen either the cause or the fight. They too have found rest in our soil of friends." This is a graveyard in which there are over 21,000 graves with a huge 20-foot high mound in the centre and a monument with a large cross and two statues on each side, one of Joseph and one of Mary. We were commenting on how God has no sense of nationality and how it is so impressive to see a cross, centred between Joseph and Mary in this particular cemetery. The ages are so moving! The youngest we saw was 17. We thought of so many of these young Germans and thinking that it's one thing to die, but it's another thing to die with absolute terror and fear and knowing that you're going to die at a very early age and perhaps just asking yourself "why"?

MADELEINE: When you think of these young Germans dying, they may not have agreed at all with the cause and the dominance that Hitler and the other S.S. members demanded of them.

TERRY: We are now in the American cemetery at Colleville-sur-mer. I am standing in a beautiful part of the garden behind the memorial. It's a semi-circle garden with flowers and a wall about eight or ten feet high. All around it are names inscribed of all those for whom there is no known grave. The inscription on the monument is: *"To these we owe the high resolve that the cause for which they died shall live."*

This is just a beautiful area. It seems very similar to what I think the Vietnam monument in Washington might be. It is just breathtaking. I am standing in the middle of the monument. Madeleine just noticed in the cemetery

obviously an old veteran, with his son, and the man was pointing out different things. He was obviously having a very difficult time, and his son had his arm around him.

This cemetery is absolutely beautiful. It sits right on the cliffs overlooking the ocean, and is just row upon row of white crosses with a broad walkway down the centre which slopes gently down to the sea. Many of the grave markers are the Star of David for the Jewish who died here. It is just a magnificent piece of property.

As we are walking through the crosses seeing the dates of death, I was looking for one that might have been July 14/15, 1944, to think of somebody who was killed the same day as Dad, and what that person's life would have been and what his family's life has been without him. You look at so many of these gravesites and a lot of them, of course, are June 6, 1944. So many of them are after that and you lose sight of the fact that the war was a whole lot longer than just this one day.

Madeleine just found several grave markers bearing names with the inscription "Killed July 14 1944." In the same area, and killed on the same day, is one that simply states: *"Here rests in honoured glory a comrade in arms known but to God."*

It is quite incredible as we walk through here and see graves dated July 14th, 1944 and you wonder how many other wives and mothers and families got telegrams and visits on those days with the same kind of news my mother and grandparents had received. Madeleine just found one gravesite with the inscription: *Killed December 25, 1944.*

We are now sitting outside the Canadian cemetery at Beny-sur-Mer, getting ready to leave after spending an hour here. Again, this has probably been one of the most moving experiences of my whole life to see the names and the birth places of Canadians. It is an absolutely beautiful setting here. We were the only ones in the cemetery except for one other young couple walking around. It is so quiet and peaceful, all you could hear were the birds. We remarked on the beauty of the silence in contrast to the noises of war.

The youngest age on a gravesite here I saw was 18. I saw the graves of three airmen. I said to Madeleine that the most striking difference between this cemetery and the American cemetery is that many of the headstones have inscriptions on them from mothers and wives, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters. And somehow it seems to personalize the loss so much more.

At every cemetery, inside the gates, in a special place, is a book for visitors to sign. The inscription that I wrote in the visitor's book was:

"For a Father never known, never forgotten – always loved."

TERRY: It is now Sunday morning and we've just visited Canadian Cemetery Number 2 at Vimy. The most striking thing is that it seems that well over 75 or 80 percent of these nearly three thousand graves are all marked:

"A soldier of the great war known only to God."

As we're driving around this area, anywhere off the road is all fenced off because you can still see the huge

craters in the ground and they warn you not to go around outside or off the roads because there are still unexploded shells and explosives in the ground here.

From a video track, we learned of "the tremendous effort made by the Canadian infantry divisions to take Vimy Ridge which had been for the Germans a strategic position for more than two years, fortifying it with tunnels. In March, 1917, the Canadian artillery was ready for battle having studied Vimy Ridge in detail. Roads, railroads, tunnels and trenches had been built. Preparations were made and tons of ammunition and goods were transported to the foot of the ridge. On the day of the attack, every soldier knew what his objective was. United along a 7,000-meter front, the four Canadian divisions would fight side by side for the first time, supported by a British reserve division. One million shells were piled along the side of the guns. For the next twenty days there would be no let up. After endless hours of combat and hills to be taken, the battle for Vimy Ridge was over. The German soldiers taken prisoners had said that if they couldn't hold the ridge, they would lose the war. It took several more months and many more deaths before the First World War ended on November 11, 1918 and the time of Remembrance began. "

I was thinking of my grandfather as he had fought at Vimy Ridge, of how he survived this terrible battle and wondered how many of these young men might have been people that he knew and had been his friends. I was saying to Madeleine how phenomenal it is that we've gone through our lives experiencing certain friendships that have had a chance to grow, and how so many of these young guys didn't.

I'm now standing at the foot of the Vimy Ridge monument, which is absolutely incredible to behold. From the picture I took from far back of the wall on which all the names are inscribed, there's a lower part of it, and when Madeleine stands up against it, she doesn't reach the top. The wall is about eight feet high. Inscribed on the monument, on the right-hand column are the words:

"To the valor of their countrymen in the Great War and in memory of their 60,000 dead this monument is raised by the people of Canada." All around this wall are inscribed the names of men who died and knew of no known grave. Madeleine noted one in particular, "T. Roach, served as T. Fenton", which she assumed was someone who lied about his age in order that he could join up.

As we walk all around the monument, you see so many times the same name with different initials and you wonder whether some of them might have been related, brothers or father and son or cousins. At the end of it is written the inscription *"Here ends the roll of 11,285 Canadians who gave their lives in the Great War, but the site of whose graves is unknown. The whole number of these is 18,283. The names not recorded here are engraved on the Memorial Arch to the armies of the British Empire at Menin Gate of Ypres."*

We were just talking and I was explaining to Madeleine that the Menin Gate at Ypres is where every night at eight o'clock the traffic stops and the bells ring as part of the Last Post Ceremony held every day. I was thinking what an incredible tribute that is, that after nearly 100 years, the people of Belgium still remember to honour those who gave their lives for the cause of freedom.

As I walk around the front of the monument, you see the vast expanse of the Douai Plain and you realize why this particular ridge was such an important position. It just expands into the whole countryside. On the front part of the monument overlooking this vast plain, I'm not sure how far you can see from here, but in some cases I

suspect it seems to be at least 30 miles in almost a semi-circular direction, 180 degrees that you can see from here. Inscribed on the front of the monument is: *"The Canadian Corps., 9th of April, 1917, with four divisions in line on a front of four miles attacked and captured this ridge"*.

MADELEINE; It seems so very strange to be walking on this hallowed land that is so carefully marked off with fences where you can't go because of the craters and unexploded shells - and there are sheep all around that property. It seems like such a dichotomy to have sheep grazing so peacefully on land that is still so obviously marked by signs of war and still has remnants of war buried in it.

As you leave and walk away from the front of the memorial, as this is a national park for Canada, there are two flags flying side by side: the Canadian flag and the French flag. This land that we are walking on, donated by France, is Canadian land.

TERRY; We are just arriving at what they call the tunnels. The following was taped as the tunnel guide spoke.

TUNNEL GUIDE: For starters, we're going to be making our way down 8 metres below the surface. Now this is relatively shallow as there were deeper fighting tunnels that stretched 25 to 30 metres below the surface. What we're seeing today remains intact from the First World War. There has been very little done to change the tunnel itself. The obvious exception here is the entranceway. The soldiers would not have had steps leading up to a nice little gate. This would have been very well camouflaged as well. A small little hole and perhaps a wooden ramp leading up to the front-line area here. Similarly, the sandbags have been replaced with concrete so that they can be preserved.

In the tunnel itself, the dimensions are essentially the same. Wherever there were wooden brackets, those have been replaced with cement for safety purposes and there's been a grid put along the ceiling to prevent any chalk from slipping. But beyond that, other than the lighting, what you're seeing is the actual tunnel.

The observations been made already that the wall you see here is chalk. Now chalk is quite easy to dig through. It wasn't a huge difficulty to actually cut through this in order to advance. The difficulty lied more in getting rid of the chalk somehow. If you can imagine that for every metre that you dig in a tunnel of these dimensions, you have to get rid of 200 bags of chalk, 200 sandbags full of chalk. Keeping in mind this tunnel itself is 1200 metres, you'll discover that there are a lot of bags to be removed. Now chalk, although it's easy to dig through, is also very porous and sounds hollow to a certain extent. You have to be very careful that the sound doesn't travel. So that, for instance, the Germans wouldn't know where the entrances or exits to these tunnels were located, or to what extent they were being dug. Now, less of a concern for a subway tunnel that's extending back away from the front lines. So, we're now actually making our way through the exit. The soldiers are advancing a kilometre away towards the front line. We're coming in backwards. So, this would have been the last portion of the tunnel to actually be dug. Which means that a kilometre or so away making noise isn't much of an issue. If you were digging a deeper fighting tunnel below the front line, then it becomes an issue because the Germans themselves are doing the same thing. It becomes an underground chess match trying to counteract each tunnel that's being dug.

The important thing to realize is that the 'tunnelist' themselves worked on these tunnels relatively quickly.

In fact, the entire network in this area was completed in a little under four months. Again, the main challenge is where do you put the chalk? Well, at night, what they would often do was fill shell holes and cover them with soil or if they were a safe distance from the front line, they could actually leave the chalk exposed, provided they could limit aerial surveillance because in a black and white photograph from several kilometres away, the chalk almost appears to be water, whereas, if you were directly above it, it would be quite obvious that it wasn't.

TERRY: We were just standing in an area where there is a bunch of old equipment lying around and our guide was explaining that every year they would recover about 20 tons of metal fragments and scraps from the ground. They estimate there is still one unexploded shell per square metre in this region. If they continue to recover it all at the rate that they have in the first 85 years, it will take 700 years for them to recover all of it. Many of the big craters are because of explosions from underground.

TUNNEL GUIDE: I want to point out a few things. We started the tunnel tour just towards the flagpole. The entrance is in behind. We made our way along, to this is about the halfway point. The ventilation shaft, which you saw, is that brick box right there and then, when the tunnel continues, where I sort of pointed out to you that it went on for another kilometre, is approximately where that white sign is with the black arrow. And that kind of points to the end of where we are able to go.

Now, the entrance for the soldiers themselves extends off into the distance there. You'll see it's almost like an island of trees. Maybe 100 metres or so beyond that is where the entrance would have been. Now that hasn't been recovered, it's not opened to the public or anything, but according to the maps that have been created, that's approximately where the entrance would have been. So you can imagine then this entire area with 14 tunnels, side by side, was almost like a maze below the surface and, you can understand then, how they were able to get that sheer number of men towards the front line without the German side necessarily knowing about it.

Now, as for the significance to Canadians, there are a number of different reasons why this site has been preserved. For starters, they were successful in capturing the ridge. That is noteworthy because it had been attempted three previous times and they hadn't been successful, and by 'they', I'm referring to the French and British, the soldiers who had tried these attacks. And the sacrifices were huge. Even when the Canadians did manage to capture the ridge, there were upwards of 6500 men who were killed in the attempt. As for Canadian involvement in the First World War in general, when the war began, there were only 3,000 soldiers in the Canadian Army. The population of the country in 1914 was only eight million people. They sent over 600,000 troops throughout the course of the First World War and, again assuming that most of these were volunteers as well and that almost none of them had previous fighting experience, that's a fairly significant contribution. There were over 235,000 casualties, meaning injured or killed. So if you were looking just at those who were killed upwards of 66,000.

The monument itself has the names of 11,285 Canadian soldiers who lost their lives throughout the course of the First World War and have no known burial place. That in conjunction with the close to 7,000 names on the Menin Gate in Ypres, Belgium, represent all of the Canadian soldiers who have no known grave. And so, this site, the 250 acres or so of land that was given to Canada in perpetuity on behalf of the French Government, the mandate for Canada was to maintain it, was to preserve it so that it could be seen by future generations and

appreciated for that reason. So, all of the shell holes and the trenches that you see remain intact. The trees were planted as part of a reforestation project to prevent further erosion. With all of the wind that comes up over the monument and over the hill, this whole area would have been flattened within a few years had that not been done. In order to preserve this as a memorial, every tree here that was planted by Canadians and you see huge numbers of Maple trees and other Canadian trees.

TERRY: As we were leaving the tunnels, our guide was explaining to us that the average age of the Canadian soldier during the First World War was 22. Then he said something that struck me when he said, "Vimy Ridge is not a park, it is a memorial." Of those 11,285 names, there are literally thousands of them that are still buried here somewhere. As you look around and see the hills and plain, we felt that we were truly on holy ground.

After our stop at Vimy, we stopped at the cemetery at Beaumont-Hamel. The plaque at the entrance reads: *"Beaumont-Hamel symbolizes the service and sacrifice of Newfoundlanders during the First World War. The park pays a special tribute to the role of the Newfoundland Regiment in the Battle of the Somme and the heavy losses it suffered. The park also stands as a memorial to those Newfoundlanders who fell in battle and have no known grave. The Newfoundland Regiment participated in the great Somme offensive where on the 1st of July, 1916, strategic and tactical miscalculations lead to a terrible slaughter. Despite its horrific casualties, the Regiment fought until 1918. For its valour, it won the right to add Royal to its name. The only such honour bestowed during the Great War. Once a battlefield, Beaumont-Hamel became in 1992 a memorial park, conceived by Padre Thomas Nangle and planned by Rudolph H.K. Kosbius. Its design evokes a Newfoundland environment. Overlooking the battlefield stands a bronze caribou resting on a granite base surrounded by plants native to the island. Three bronze tablets bear the names of Newfoundlanders buried elsewhere. This memorial park honours those soldiers and ensures that their sacrifice will never be forgotten."*

It's now Monday morning, the 20th of May, and we're on our way to Langres from Amiens, to visit Monsieur Jean Hallade and his wife, Marie-Therese, whom we have been put into contact with but had never met. Since we were quite a bit earlier than we thought, we stopped at a British cemetery that was on our way. It's a cemetery that when you look at the inscription on it has 481 British, 69 Canadian, 1 Australian, 14 South African and 2 German soldiers who were killed here during the First World War and also 36 British, 3 Canadian, 2 Australian and 2 New Zealand servicemen of the Second World War. I was looking at seven graves that are lined up right at the front of the cemetery, obviously a bomber crew. What struck me was their ages: Pilot Officer age 21, navigator age 26, wireless operator air gunner age 22, air bomber- no age, flight engineer age 20, air gunner age 22 and air gunner age 18. Madeleine pointed out again as you look at the headstones in this cemetery, the ages of those buried ranges from 18 to 42, side by side, and there are so many of these headstones that simply say, "A soldier of the Great War known to God." She voiced that all the cemeteries that we have visited are tributes to the people who served, to life, to freedom, to peace. Pensively, she added: Will we ever learn?

The morning after we arrived at Hallades', Jean took us on a short tour of Chauny, which is the major commercial centre where they lived. Then when we came back, we went to a small town approximately six or eight kilometres from here, one of the small communities where there is another military gravesite as part of a small civilian cemetery. The graves are obviously that of crew members of a bomber that fell during the Second World War. It's the same kind of situation as at Ancerville with the graves of just the one crew. The oldest was 35 and the youngest was 21, and the others were between 21 and 26. It was really interesting for me to see that there is another small community in France where there is a single crew buried and realizing that there must be literally hundreds of similar small towns around the area with the graves of the crew one aircraft.

When visiting with Jean, one of the things we did was to see a memorial he was responsible for with respect to the Résistance. He took us into an area not far from Chauny where there was a field in the middle of a heavily treed area. He was explaining to us that he was a leader of the Resistance in his area during the Second World War. Part of his role was to assist downed airmen to escape. He explained how it was his Resistance's cell task to hide the men for a period of time, and then to make arrangements to move them through the forested area and field to another cell on the other side, or elsewhere. What I found fascinating was his explanation that there was a method of communication to make arrangements, but members of any one cell never knew who was in any of the others.

I wanted to take this time to dictate these notes because Marie-Therese and Jean were telling us that when Jean's mother returned to her village in this area right after the First World War, she came back in early 1919 and what struck her was the total absence of sound. There were no birds, there were no animals around left living. Everything was just devastated. And they were telling us how it was such an incredible event for her the first time she heard a bird singing after she came back to her village after the war.

We are just leaving the Hallades and I was saying to Madeleine that they are such marvellously knowledgeable people with their vast experience. I had no sense really of the oppression that they lived under in both World Wars, particularly in the First World War, but to hear them talk about the destruction of their homes and the inability to do different things was just really amazing to hear them. And to hear Jean's experience of working with the Résistance, the French Underground and the Airmen that they helped escape was just so eye opening. His group aided eighty-six different Airmen during the war to escape via the underground system. It was just an amazing visit with them and Gerard, their friend that used to live with them is a very interesting guy, obviously in my view, very intelligent and/or extremely well-read. They were all just marvellously friendly people and having spent two days with them, it seems like we've known them for a long, long time. We've learned so much from them and about them, and about their country in the time of war over the last little while.

I was very intrigued and impressed by Jean Hallade when I spent time with him. He gave me a book he had written which contained a section about the time we had buried my mother's ashes in Ancerville. The book is entitled "Aviateurs dans l'Aventure" and the story of my father and me is entitled "Une Triste Mais Belle Histoire." It was only in the course of writing this memorial book that I researched him and found out that he was a highly respected man in France. He was an author of several books about aviation, and was well known for his role as a leader in the Resistance. He received dozens of decorations from France, Canada and the United States. He was the subject of a French TV documentary, "An Ordinary Hero," and was made a Commander in the French Order of Merit.

TERRY: It's now Friday morning, and we have travelled to Ancerville. We had stopped on the way to pick up a plant to put on my father's grave. Upon arrival, we went directly to Yvon and Renee Vannerot's home and were told that we had to go directly to the cemetery as there were people waiting. Yvon had arranged that we would be there at 10:30am. We went to the cemetery where there were about 20 men and one woman all gathered around. The woman was one of two journalists present and a number of the men were members of the 'Les Anciens Combattants', the Veterans of various different military services. There were four flag bearers. One man told me that he had been there on July 15 of '44. Another man that we spoke to said that he was only 18 months old at that time, but his grandparents told him all about what happened, how they heard the plane, saw

it flying over, seeming to circle over the city, heard it crash and how everybody then rushed out to the forest. Mr. Vannerot explained to the people how at the time the Germans were very upset because the townspeople got the bodies and they made a very big deal out of burying them. They had a big ceremony to bury them and the Germans were quite upset, but they didn't interfere.

At the cemetery everybody gathered around the grave. Yvon pulled a big bouquet of flowers out of the trunk of his car. We followed the flag bearers into the cemetery and he placed the flowers from the community of Ancerville on the grave. Madeleine then placed the plant that we had purchased. I then spoke in French to the people gathered. I explained to them that the water I had in a little jar was water that we had taken from St. Patrick's Church in Felling-on-Tyne, England, where my parents were married. I explained to them the significance of what it was for us to take water from where they began their married life, and now, for me as a Deacon, to bless the grave where they are both lying together, fifty-eight years after their wedding day! After I blessed the grave we said a prayer, and I thanked the people for being present.

Following this brief ceremony, Yvon, who is the mayor of Ancerville and also the Vice Counsel General of the Region, took us on a driving tour of the Region. We first went into this really old church. It was absolutely marvellous, and we saw a sculpture there that was being restored, I think it was from the 12th century.

We left the church and drove through the region on our way to the Verdun memorial. Yvon explained to us that Verdun was an extremely important battle for the French. It is a major part of their history because during the First World War, the Germans were pushing inland and they stalled at Verdun as it was a major point for them to take. The French, the British and the Americans dug right in. The Germans almost had them fully surrounded in a horseshoe, but they couldn't push back over the hill at Verdun. They never were able to gain this strategic position. It was an absolutely major battle during the First World War as it prevented the Germans from advancing any further into France.

When you drive between Verdun and the memorial that's there, you drive along the road between Verdun and Bar-le-Duc. This route is known as *La Voie Sacrée – the Sacred Road*. It's the only road in France that doesn't have a number on it. It's just called NVS, National Route Voie Sacrée. It has small monuments at every kilometer along all the way until you reach the actual *Douaumont Monument - Ossuary*, which is designated a national cemetery. It is magnificent and immense. It stands out in the countryside the way the monument at Vimy Ridge does, but it's much bigger having only one tower and two arms going out each side and one out the back in the shape of a cross. Through small outside windows, the skeletal remains of at least 130,000 unidentified combatants of both France and Germany can be seen filling up alcoves at the lower edge of the building. As Madeleine said "It is eerie and gives you shivers to see all of these bones, just piled up, rooms and rooms full of bones and skulls."

When you enter the building, you walk up into where the two arms cross in the middle into a huge magnificent hall. All along on the walls are inscribed the names of unknown soldiers who are known to have died during the First World War but don't have any particular known grave. The beautiful chapel is at the back arm of the cross. We were saying while we were inside there that being in it almost gave you the sense of being in a tomb surrounded by all those people. On the grounds just outside the building is a French cemetery with 7,000 graves.

Just down the road we went to another amazing place called the Trench of the Bayonets. In June, 1916, France's 137th Infantry Regiment were the object of constant shelling by the Germans who wanted to take this area before their main offensive into France. The regiment's third company had lost over half of its men. The remainder had been placed in rows of exposed trenches directly observable by German artillery spotters, who continued to shell them until they were all annihilated. After the war, French teams exploring the battlefield discovered the trench had been completely filled in. Rifles protruded from part of it, at regular intervals, with bayonets still fixed to their twisted and rusty muzzles. On excavation, a body was found beneath each rifle. You can still see the bayonets protruding from the ground.

After seeing the Trench of the Bayonets, we drove through the countryside, a long way it seemed, until we arrived at the American cemetery of the First World War. It is probably even a more impressive site than the American cemetery at Normandy. This particular cemetery has 14,800 graves. It is absolutely immaculate. The grass is beautiful, every cross is clean and it's just an amazing site to see.

On our way back to Vannerot's, we stopped again in the forest of Valtiermont-Jovilliers where my father's aircraft went down. The crash site was probably even more evident than when we had first seen it in 1998. This time you could see a big open space in the forest where the trees have not grown back up yet after all this time. There is still a visible depression where the aircraft actually went down.

On our way back home, we also drove through Revigny-sur-Ornain and saw the train station and the switching area that they were supposed to be bombing that night but could not because of weather. That was really something for me to be right there. In fact, as we were driving through the town, I had a really strange sensation because I saw a couple of young girls walking along the road. I thought to myself maybe it's good that the mission didn't succeed that night because maybe one of those young girl's mother would not have survived and never have given birth to her. It was a different sensation to have, but it was very, very hard for me to look at that train station and know the history of the raid. It seemed to be so incredibly stupid to have tried to bomb that particular location that evening when the weather was bad and they knew it was a very tough location. The German fighter base at St. Dizier was about 15 kilometres in a straight line away from where that railway station was and why they ever sent bombers on a mission virtually directly over where the German fighter base was, it's just hard to understand.

On our way back to Ancerville, we drove through a small village which is a place where on August 29, 1944, the Germans virtually killed every young man in the town out of retaliation for some of them failing to report to a train which was to take them elsewhere. Some men, including Renée's uncle with his son, went and hid in the woods. There were seven villages surrounding where the monument is that were totally devastated. There was absolutely nothing left of them afterwards.

It was a long and difficult day for us seeing and feeling so much. It was time to get to bed, as tomorrow is another day and, in the morning, we head out early for Langres.

Our notes made at the time ended at this point. The rest of what I write about this trip is from memory.

When we arrived at Langres we were welcomed by our contact person, M. Jacques Cornuel, whom we had not

met before. Langres is a medieval city dating back to the Roman era. There are 3.7 kilometres of seven foot thick walls surrounding much of the city. I have little recollection of the ceremony at Langres other than being present at the memorial when I was acknowledged as the Canadian representative of the families who had Canadian airmen buried in this region. I did not have to speak to the crowd assembled, but spoke with several of the local representatives and political leaders and with organizers of the Festival who expressed their thanks for my attendance and their appreciation for what those airmen who gave their lives for the people of the Langres Region had done for the liberty of France.

Although Madeleine and I do not have many memories of Langres because we made no notes of there, we do remember the experience of meeting Jacques Cornuel. He and his wife showed us wonderful hospitality in their 17th century home with a magnificent meal and some of the best wine. Jacques showed us his once secret and concealed part of the basement where his wine cellar was located. He explained that that part of the cellar was 200 years old. During the war the cellar had been sealed off to hide the wine from the invading German forces. Some of the wine dated to 1919. One of the rooms had over 100 bottles, none of them younger than 1939.

In spite of the fact that this part of this book reflects our trip in 2002, we have little other recollection of Langres. I do know that this entire 2002 trip was another part of my life in my efforts to honour and respect that most meaningful of phrases, "I Will Remember Them."



Daniel and his father Antoine

ANCERVILLE, FRANCE 2015

In August 2015 we were contacted by our now friend, the ex-mayor of Ancerville Yvon Vannerot, and his wife Renee, about a special ceremony that was being planned to honour the crash victims. We again visited Ancerville, this time with our daughters, Allison and Cynthia, and their husbands, Greg and Scott. The ceremony was the unveiling of a memorial monument directly at the site of the crash in the forest close to Ancerville.

We were all overwhelmed by the attendance and respect shown by the people of Ancerville. We assembled at the entrance to a small road that led to the location where, as I described in my earlier Reflections, an obvious depression in the forest can still be seen. There seemed to be about 200 local citizens present, including the Mayor, representatives of the local department, members of the French Air Force from the nearby base at St. Dizier and the parish priest.

Yvon spoke about the history of the crash. The Mayor spoke about the dedication and significance of the simple monument and about the airmen who lost their lives in the crash. He accompanied Madeleine and I to place a wreath. I tried to use my best French to somehow express our family's gratitude for this wonderful tribute to the six men who had given their lives.

Following the brief ceremony at the monument we walked into the forest and stood at the place where the aircraft went down. I remember thinking that this was the place my father's life ended, and I was then standing there with my daughters and their husbands, the continuation of the family of which my father would surely have been immensely proud. I specifically recall the intensity of the moment as we stood there in silence. We walked slowly back to the vehicles at the end of the small forest road. I remember there was not much said as we all seemed to be content with having our own thoughts.

We returned to the cemetery at Ancerville where there was a large crowd and an honour guard of local firefighters. Prayers were said. I remember thinking at the time how grateful I was that my daughters and their husbands were there, to think of the grandfather they never knew, and to remember the grandmother with whom they had spent her last days. I have always felt blessed and proud of my family, and standing before the grave of my parents I experienced feelings of pride in my entire family in a different way than before.

Before leaving Ancerville we were invited to Yvon and Renee's home to join with their family in a fabulous experience of French cuisine.

As we left that day, on our way to Vimy Ridge and the beaches of Normandy, I remember thinking that once again, the name "Ancerville" would always be, as my grandmother had always considered, "a sacred name."



Terry with Officers from French Air Force Base at St. Dizier



Greg, Allison, Terry, Madeleine, Cynthia, Scott, Renee, Yvon

Mission Revigny, pour notre Liberté

Dans l'insouciance d'un peu plus de 20 ans,
Huit jeunes, célibataires, mariés, en attente d'un enfant
Séducteurs ou fidèles,
Apprirent qu'ils devraient, à tire d'ailes,
Rejoindre l'est de la France.

Dans cette nuit du 14 au 15 juillet,
Pour freiner l'action des Allemands,
La mission Revigny les attendait.

C'est ainsi que ce jeune équipage entraîné
Monta à bord du Lancaster
Pour détruire les infrastructures ferroviaires :
L'ennemi ne devait pas apporter
De renforts sur la zone du débarquement.

Le bombardier mitraillait
Mais fut bientôt attaqué.
En vol, il fut touché.
Ce gros oiseau, en deux, se coupa
Et s'écrasa dans le bois :
Celui de Valtiermont

Parmi les victimes de cette tragique nuit,
Cinq jeunes, dont un Canadien,
Reposent à Ancerville.
Encore aujourd'hui,
On s'en souvient.

Une nouvelle fois, après 71 ans,
Ce Fils qu'attendait le jeune Platana
Se recueille là où repose son Papa,
Rejoint depuis par sa Maman.



*Poème créé à l'occasion de la Commémoration de la Mission Revigny
En hommage aux victimes de l'Équipage du Lancaster qui ont œuvré pour notre Liberté
...sans oublier tous Ceux qui ont combattu dans le même objectif*

Le 1^{er} août 2015, c'est en présence de Terry Platana
-le Fils de Daniel et de Sarah qui reposent au cimetière communal d'Ancerville-,
de sa Femme, de ses deux Filles et Gendres
que l'inauguration de la stèle a eu lieu

Ancerville

Royal Air Force : un hommage en famille

À l'issue de la manifestation d'inauguration, dans les bois de Valtiermont, de la stèle en hommage aux aviateurs du Lancaster de la Royal Air Force abattu dans la nuit du 14 au 15 juillet, une cérémonie s'est tenue au cimetière communal où reposent 5 corps. Présidée par l'abbé Denis Charpentier, cette dernière a revêtu un caractère particulier et très familial.

En effet, l'enfant posthume d'un des aviateurs de l'équipage reposant dans ce carré, Terrence Platana, ac-

compagné de son épouse Madeleine, de ses filles Allison, Cynthia et de leurs époux respectifs Greg et Scott, avaient tenu à marquer de leur présence cet hommage.

Terrence Platana, lors d'un de ses voyages à Ancerville, avait exaucé en août 1998 le souhait de sa maman Sarah de reposer aux côtés de son époux, le lieutenant Daniel Platana.

Un moment de recueillement en présence des diverses autorités et un dépôt de gerbes sur les tombes ont marqué cet instant.



■ La famille Platana sur la tombe du père et du grand-père.

HOMMAGE

Ancerville : une inauguration chargée d'émotion



La cérémonie s'est déroulée en forêt du Valtiermont.

Samedi 1^{er} août, de nombreuses personnalités, représentants d'associations, anciens combattants et porte-drapeaux, ainsi que des habitants d'Ancerville et des villages avoisinants, la famille du lieutenant Daniel Platana, son fils Terrence, jage à la cour d'appel de l'Ontario (Canada), son épouse Madeleine, ses filles Alison et Cynthia et leur mari Greg et Scott, étaient réunis en forêt du Valtiermont, à mi-chemin d'Ancerville et de Sommevoire, afin d'inaugurer une stèle. Celle-ci a été érigée à l'endroit où s'est écrasé, dans la nuit du 14 au 15 juillet 1944, le Lancaster B3 immatriculé PA984, venu réaliser un raid sur les infrastructures ferroviaires de Revingny, où un train de munitions stationnait. En rappelant l'événement, Yvon Vasseroit, président de l'Association commémorative d'Ancerville, a retracé le dernier vol de l'avion venu s'écraser à l'endroit même où se déroulait la commémoration. À l'époque, le maître et les adjoints, les gen-

darms, les forestiers et les pompiers, encadrés par un détachement de soldats allemands, se rendirent dans la nuit sur les lieux du sinistre. Dans les restes de l'appareil, ils découvrirent cinq corps et celui d'un petit chien (rapporté par un des premiers témoins présents sur les lieux) : Harry Robinson de la Royal Australian AF, lieutenant pilote, 24 ans ; Frédéric Holbrook de la RAF, bombardier, 24 ans ; Hugh Coker de la RAF, navigateur, 23 ans ; Frederick Lockwood de la RAF, mitrailleur, 21 ans ; Daniel Platana de la Royal Canadian AF, mitrailleur, 21 ans.

Tout le village accompagna les défunts à l'église pour un office présidé par l'abbé Chambrix, puis au cimetière, en un long défilé recueilli. Malgré les risques encourus, Yvon Vasseroit a rappelé le massacre d'Oradour-sur-Glane du 10 juin 1944 et celui tout proche de Robert-Espagne, Beirey et Courvaignes le 24 août 1944. L'équipage était composé de huit membres, le corps



M. Platana, derrière la stèle érigée en l'honneur des aviateurs, dont son père Daniel.

de l'officier aviateur Debrock fut retrouvé le 22 mars 1945 au lieu-dit "La Carrière de la Cornière". Ses obsèques ont donné lieu à une importante cérémonie, en présence de deux délégations de soldats français et anglais et de nombreux habitants, les allemands ayant quitté Ancerville. Seuls deux membres avaient survécu au crash. L'un, K. Stevens fut arrêté dans la nuit par les Allemands. L'autre, George Davies, un temps soigné et caché à la ferme de la Houline ne fut fait prisonnier que plus tard.

Histoire des hommes, mais aussi d'une famille, puisque six membres sont présents aujourd'hui. Dans le Lancaster, le poste de mitrailleur de queue était tenu par le lieutenant Daniel Platana venu du Régiment dans la province canadienne du Saskatchewan. Quelques semaines avant sa mission, Daniel avait épousé Sarah, une jeune Anglaise qui, le 4 mars 1945, accoucha de Terrence. Et ce fils de Daniel et Sarah

était présent ce jour avec son épouse, ses filles et ses gendres. Très ému et dans un excellent français, Terrence a dit combien le nom d'Ancerville était lié à celui de sa famille, rappelant que les cendres de sa mère Sarah étaient venues rejoindre la tombe de son mari dans le carré réservé aux cinq aviateurs dans le cimetière d'Ancerville. Soixante-dix ans après, il a remercié les personnes qui se sont investies dans cette réalisation ainsi que tous ceux qui se sont joints au rassemblement et particulièrement, Yvon Vasseroit. Jean-Louis Casova, a remercié les héros qui se sont sacrifiés pour les libertés et la paix, terminant son discours par un message en anglais. Puis, la délégation a été rendue au cimetière pour y déposer des gerbes sur les tombes des aviateurs où l'abbé Charpentier dans son homélie a appelé le monde à la paix. Tous se sont ensuite rendus à l'Éspace d'accueil Paulin la Tude.



Dinner With Vannerot Family



Madeleine, Yvon, Renee, Terry

REMEMBRANCES

At the top of the Parliament buildings in Ottawa in the Peace Tower there is a Hall of Remembrance with a Book containing the names of all the Canadian servicemen and women killed in action in WWII. Each day the page is turned.

When visiting Ottawa and the Peace Tower several years ago, we were absolutely overwhelmed that we had just happened to be visiting the day the book was open at the page with my father's name. We prayed together, giving thanks for the lives we have been privileged to share because of my father's sacrifice, and that of hundreds of thousands of others.



BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE

UPON THESE PAGES ARE
WRITTEN IN PROUD AND EVERLASTING MEMORY THE
NAMES OF THE MEN AND WOMEN OF OUR NAVY, ARMY
AND AIR FORCE, & OF THOSE CANADIANS IN THE ARMED
SERVICES OF THE OTHER NATIONS AND ALLIES OF THE
BRITISH COMMONWEALTH, WHO, IN THE SECOND WORLD
WAR, GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR CANADA AND IN DEFENCE
OF THE SACRED LIBERTIES OF ALL MANKIND.

.... Lay them with all that is most living.
In light transcendent;
In the ageless aisles of silence.
With the Immortals that saved the world."



1944

• OSTEDD •

• THREE RIVERS •

• DUNDLETON •

L/Cpl Pinck, Harold RHC
 Pte Pine, William Johan R Regt C
 Sgt Pineau, Francis Edmund RC Sigs
 Cpl Piniak, William Calgary R
 WO1 Pinner, Roy Irving RCAF
 Pte Pipe, Donald James Alq R
 F/O Piper, John Ralph RCAF
 C/M Piper, Ronald Frederick RCEME
 F/O Piprell, Gordon Leslie RCAF
 Sgt Pirie, John Charles, MM Line & Willd R
 Pte Pirie, John Robert 1r RC
 Cpl Pirie, Robert Calvin RCD
 L/Cpl Pirrie, Harold Edward 1r RC
 PO Pitkin, Edmund Francis RCAF
 Pte Pitre, Albert Joseph RCIC
 L/Cpl Pitre, Edgar Lan & Ren Scot R
 Tpr Pitre, Neri Gerald Three Riv R
 Pte Pitre, Randolph N Shore R
 Sap Pitre, Roland RCE
 Spr Pittman, Harold Lester RCE
 F/O Pittman, John Benjamin RCAF
 Pte Pittner, Joseph John HLI of C
 Sgt Pitts, Robert Michael RCAF
 Sgt Piuze, Yvon, MM R22 R
 Pte Pixley, Frederick James Cameron of C
 Pte Plante, Ernest Real R22 R
 Pte Plante, George James Westm R
 Pte Plante, Herve R de Mais
 S/O brev Plante, Jean-Marie Charles RCAF
 Pte Plante, Maurice RCIC
 R/In Plante, Philippe QOR of C
 F/O Platania, Daniel Dominique, DFC RCAF
 Pte Platt, George John Tor Scot R
 PO Plecan, Frank George RCAF
 Pte Plecas, Joseph Westm R
 Pte Pledger, Kenneth Mervyn 1 Cdn Para Bn
 F/L Pledger, Thomas Oswald, DFC RCAF
 Pte Plester, John SSask R
 Pte Ploschansky, Joseph Hast & PER
 Ldg Sto Plott, John RCNVR
 Pte Plouffe, Jean Fus MR
 Pte Plumtree, Wesley George R Regt C

Pte Plumridge, George Henry Lan & Ren Scot R
 F/O Plunkett, Leonard Stanley RCAF
 PO Plunkett, William RCAF
 Cpl Pockiluk, Henry Andrew 1H
 Sgt Pockock, Douglas Layne RCAF
 Pte Pockock, Walter Henry, Calg Highrs
 PO Pockock, William Francis RCAF
 Pte Podann, Lorne Henry Perth R
 Pte Podborachinski, Marion Cameron of C
 Pte Podryski, Thomas Paul SSask R
 Pte Poe, Raymond David R Regt C
 WO2 Poe, Robert David RCAF
 F/O Pogson, William Henry RCAF
 L/Cpl Pogue, David James Lan & Ren Scot R
 L/Cpl Poho, William R Wpa RIF
 Lt Poirier, Alfred Hubert RCR
 S/MC Poirier, Eugene R de Mais
 Pte Poirier, Francis CB Highrs
 Pte Poirier, Gerald Joseph Carl & York R
 Lt Poirier, Jacques Joseph Lucien RC Sigs
 Pte Poirier, Jean Eudes RCAMC
 Pte Poirier, Joseph William N Shore R
 Cav Poirier, Roger Three Riv R
 Pte Poissant, Georges Emile Fus MR
 Pte Poitras, James Edward SD & G Highrs
 Gnr Poitras, Joseph RCA
 Tpr Poland, Herbert John BCR
 F/O Pole, Douglas Campbell RCAF
 F/O Pole, Ross Norman RCAF
 Gnr Poley, Harold Edward RCA
 Pte Polinski, Emil L Edmn R
 R/In Polishak, Gust John Regina RIF
 Pte Pollard, David RHLI
 L/Cpl Pollard, George Gerald SD & G Highrs
 Tpr Pollard, Ralph Howard Ont R
 Pte Pollender, Paul Emile Maurice, 1 Cdn Spec Ser Bn
 PO Pollock, Albert Lyle RCAF
 Pte Pollock, Arthur John RCR
 L/Cpl Pollock, Edison 1H
 Pte Pollock, Ivan George RHC

In Memory of
Flying Officer Air Gunner
Daniel Dominique Platana

D F C

J/18616, 156 (R.A.F.) Sqdn., Royal Canadian Air Force who died on 15 July 1944 Age 21

Son of Antoine and Marthe-Marie Platana, of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada; husband of Sarah Platana.

Remembered with Honour
Ancerville Communal Cemetery



Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

I conclude this memorial book with a reference to the meaningful words of remembrance which I say every year on November 11th. I say the words knowing that I have no real memory of my father, yet somehow, preparing this book has given me an insight into and an imaginative memory of the father I never knew. Through these words

and pictures,

I can say as meaningfully as I can,

"I will remember them."



Daniel Dominique Platana
September 25, 1922--July 15, 1944



About the Author

The Honourable Terrence Platana, retired judge of the Northwestern Region of Ontario Superior Court of Justice, is the son of Flying Officer, Air Gunner Daniel Domminique Platana, DFC. This book was compiled in remembrance of his father who perished while serving with the Royal Canadian Air Force during WWII.