

## CHAPTER SIX

### The Outcome (continued from Chapter 1)

As Steve rose to help his pal with the obstinate parachute pack, the insides of the aircraft became filled with red-hot pieces of flying metal. Cannon shells and tracer bullets ripped through the skin of the Lancaster and in moments, both crew felt the aircraft give a shudder and lurch sickeningly downwards. Neither of them had heard the desperate warning from Sam to the pilot, who immediately commenced the first part of a corkscrew by diving, as Sam had instructed, to port. They could both hear the hammering of the incoming shells and above even this, the answering fire from the turrets just above and behind them.

It was too late. The damage had already been done. Empty shell cases were showering onto the fuselage floor from above. Incoming fire must have punctured the spent shell casing sacks in the dorsal turret and the casings were now falling all around the two pals as they scrabbled around. If that was the case, then it was almost certain that Sam had been hit as well.

In the cockpit, Peter began to wrestle with the controls but that first salvo had done untold damage. The control system was wrecked and now the aircraft refused to respond to the movement of either control column or rudder pedals. Cables, linkages and hydraulic pipes that should have been transmitting the pilots input at the controls to the flying control surfaces had been severed and were rendered useless. The bomber had already begun its death spiral. On top of that the radio equipment and intercom system was smashed beyond use and there was no way that they could communicate either with each other or with the outside world. Not that any of those things was going to save them now.

Fritz had loosed off a near perfect non-deflection shot, this time on a totally unsuspecting victim. No one on the bomber had witnessed his stealthy approach. His aim had been perfect as he rose gently beneath the port wing of the bomber. Cloaked in the darkness, he throttled back to almost match the bombers speed, he managed to position the fighter perfectly in the blind spot and as he slowly came within range, still unseen, he had opened the throttles and given a gentle pull back on the control column. The Lancaster's port wing-root swung across his sights. He had squeezed the firing buttons with the deliberation of a sniper and carefully pushed the rudder bar with his left foot. He raked the exposed underside of the wing and fuselage with one long burst from all his guns.

At the very moment that he fired the Lancasters pilot had obviously got a warning for he had banked the aircraft steeply over to port and commenced a dive which had taken him down across the Germans nose as he had continued to fire. The mid-upper turret had instantly opened fire, shortly followed by the tail-gunner, but Fritz and his crew were passed and away before any of the return fire came close. Almost as suddenly the fire from the dorsal turret had ceased. Now the bomber continued on its fiery, spiralling downward path and he couldn't see it recovering from that. Fire had begun to flicker along the port wing instantly and he felt sure that this was going to be confirmed as his 8<sup>th</sup> victory. Finally satisfied with his nights' work and not

wanting to hang about any longer for fear of not reaching his base, he calmly set course for Coulommiers. Once there he would relax with a warming glass of Schnapps before retiring to bed. He didn't feel there would be any need to await the confirmation, he was sure it would follow soon enough. The time was 01.55 as he banked the plane towards the east.

Inside the stricken bomber, miraculously, the shells and bullets had hit no one but all was utter confusion. The empty shell cases had been falling because Sam had removed the sack that was supposed to catch them when he had boarded the previous evening. It made his entry into the confined turret that much easier when in full flying kit. Unusually for him he had failed to re-attach this before they had taken off. Now, with the aircraft beyond any control, the survivors within the spinning confines of the fuselage were totally stunned and disorientated. At first they were thrown against the roof and then drooped back to the floor which was now awash with hydraulic fluid along with the spent cartridge cases and ammunition belt clips. As the spin increased so did the gravitational force on their bodies. This mayhem was not something that any of them could have been trained for, nobody liked to think about the time when they would have to leave their aircraft and certainly not in the utter confusion that now enveloped them.

Lancasters were notoriously difficult to exit when flying fairly straight and level.

Eventually they were pinned against the inside of the fuselage as the mortally wounded bomber howled down to oblivion. There was no panic; just the slow awakening that this was to be their final flight. None of the crew could escape now. Even if Geoff had been aware of where the escape hatch was located inside this tumbling, fiery mass of useless metal and other debris, he had no parachute. This had dislodged from its previously immovable position and was nowhere to be seen.

Just a few short moments ago she was a deadly yet graceful flying machine and now there was nothing at all graceful about her but the deadly had come to mean something even more sinister.

As with many that are staring death in the face, all Geoff's' earlier fears had evaporated to be replaced by a calmness and acceptance of his situation. With certain knowledge that, beyond the next few moments, there was to be no future and that all his dreams would never come true.

Blinded by the acrid smoke and searing heat that rapidly filled the interior of the fuselage, visions of his past life began to appear in his mind. These were not like the shimmering black and white newsreel images flashing and jumping across a smoky white backdrop that came before the main feature at the local cinemas. These were in glorious Technicolor, in the most vivid of detail. At first there was only blackness. Then, much as the footlights would come up in a cinema, a pulsing sound and sensation accompanied a reddish glow. There was a rumbling that was felt as much as heard. Feelings of floating inside some watery cavern and yet this was warm and comforting. These sensations all ceased as a great pressure was exerted on his body and the reddish glow was replaced by white light. The screen curtains had been drawn. Gone were the watery sounds, now everything was much clearer. Fluid in his lungs was replaced with air and the soft cradling fluid was replaced by a new sensation, his body was being handled by something quite rough. With the air in his lungs and his throat cleared, his vocal chords were able to work and he let out a cry.

Close by a soothing voice reached his hearing.

"There you are Elsie, a healthy bouncing boy, blond by the looks of it and everything's there alright. I'll just wrap him up and you can hold him".

Then another more familiar voice came clearly through the air.

"Oh, he's so beautiful, George will be pleased, especially to know that he has a son and heir".

It was the voice of his mother, so long forgotten. Tears filled his eyes.

No one will ever know what happened in that bomber that night; my story is completely fictitious, but wholly based on real people, with known facts and information gleaned from many sources.

The XV Squadron records simply show the aircraft as: -

'Missing. Nothing heard'.

DETAIL OF WORK CARRIED OUT  
BY XV. (IS) SQUADRON  
FOR THE MONTH OF JUNE 1944

SECRET

AIRCRAFT TYPE & NUMBER	CREW	LOGIC	TIME		DETAILS OF SORTIE OR FLIGHT	REFERENCES
			Up	Down		
LANCABTR 5.44 LL.889 B	A42502 P/O. FURRY R.(P) P/O. WETZ J.(N), A41039 F/S. GOODHORN E.(F/O), F/S. GILFILLAN R.I.A./E., F/S. MILON T.(M/O), Sgts. CANTRELL C.(R/O), BOLFE R.(F/O).		2350	0512 1st	THREAT. Smoke obscured most ground detail, but lake could be seen. M/O gave instructions to bomb yellow fires, and several bursts were observed in the fires on the run up. Results should be satisfactory.	
LM.121 O	A42150 P/O. DOMERAIN R.(P), A42528 F/S. LONG A.(N), Sgt. NORTH B.(R/O), A41563 F/S. JAMIESON I.(A/B), A42599 F/S. NYSTRON S.(M/O), A42732 F/S. HILL R.(R/O), Sgt. GRAYSON L.(F/O).		2357		Missing. Nothing heard.	
LM.109 F	A42886 P/O. WOODRIF C.(P), A41007 F/S. TURNER T.(N), A42360 F/S. ARMSTRONG J.(M/O), A42508 F/S. WATSON O.(A/B), Sgt. LILLEY A.(M/O), HIGGS B.(R/O), HASTED G.(F/O).		2358	0530	M/O was not heard. Visibility was good, lake being seen clearly. Red & Green Tls seen and the latter bombed. Attack appeared well concentrated and fires were burning strongly at the end of each	
LM.466 F	M42409 P/O. JOHNSON M.(P), F/S. KING E.(M), F/S. PAINE J.(W/O), F/S. HARRISON G.(A/B), Sgts. HARTLEY A.(M/O), BAKER N.(R/O), MAREN E.(F/O).		2354	0507	Red markers seen on approach, but Yellow was bombed on arrival as M/O considered them accurate. Apart from the lake no ground detail could be identified.	
LL.806 J	J24469 P/O. WELLS W.(P), J27580 F/O. RUDD J.(N), Sgt. BOZELER J.(M/O), J28694 F/O. MONTGOMERY Z.(A/B), Sgt. NORTH R.(M/O), M40849 Sgt. PENNEY D.(R/O), Sgt. BURNBY H.(F/O).		2355	0502	Bombd Red Tls as M/O was not heard. Immediately afterwards the lake was identified, and judging by its position our bombs had fallen short.	
ND.395 K	F/S. FERRELL W.(P), Sgt. FORD B.(M/O), P/O. BERRY H.(W/O), F/O. HARRIS R.(A/B), Sgt. BROWN J.(M/O), Sgts. WYNTON W.(R/O), POOLE W.(R/O), M418622 Capt. BISHOP O.(F/O).		2354	0516	Ran in to attack White Tl. Put had to correct course to avoid collision. M/O was then asked to advise bombing the Yellow. Bombing was concentrated producing much smoke. Encountered 100 ft of return and sustained damage to port engine fuselage, fired airdials, and tailplane and wing structure.	
LL.781 L	P/O. BELL W.(P), Sgt. KIRK C.(M), Sgt. WHEATMAN P.(M/O), F/S. OAKES E.(A/B), Sgt. BISHOP A.(M/O), BROXTFIELD T.(R/O), FITCH A.(F/O).		2356	0433 1st	Red Tls were seen falling about 10 miles above on run up. Lake could be seen and M/O instructed that Yellow Tls were accurate. Bombed Yellow and most of bombing appeared well concentrated.	
LM.945 H	M415223 F/O. PHILLIPS B.(P), P/O. SINGOR J.(M), Sgt. BROWN H.(W/O), P/O. WILSON R.(A/B), A430028 F/S. SHANFIELD J.(M/O), A427712 F/O. GOUGH S.(R/O), Sgt. PARSALL P.(F/O).		0005	0505	Eastern part of lake was obscured by pull of smoke. We were instructed by M/O to bomb yellow spot fires and we saw our bombs burst along pier.	

No other aircraft from the squadron reported seeing 'C Charlie' shot down although one other aircraft, ND395 LS-K, was attacked and damaged on the return flight. Subsequent investigations by the Royal Air Force have led to the loss report being completed as follows: -

Place of Loss...	1 Km. W. Lormaison. 20 Km. S. Beauvais
Cause of Loss. .	Night fighter.
Airframe % destroyed	100%
How a/c landed - -	Crashed, burst into flames.

**Below.** The front and back of the Loss Record card for LM121 which contained so much sad, but useful, information that help piece together this written account.

		HUNDREDS				TENS			UNITS			FL. LP. FL. N.		
		YEAR	MONTH	DAY		SQUADRON			TYPE OF A/C			CAUSE		
NON OF.	DATE	TYPE	SERIAL No.	GP.	SQ.	L	TIME OFF	BASE	TARGET	E.T.A. TARGET	FUEL	A.U.W.		
OC.	31.5.44	Mustang	47121	3	13	2		Widenerhall	Trappes	See copy				
CAR.	REF.	MODS.	SPEC. EQUIP.		TIME OF FIXES	POSITION OF FIXES			BOMB LOAD					
DAY	22/5		Booster - H25			Leading Mustang			4943N/0020E 4910N/0210E			4 x 1000		
SPEC.	8350		Handred aft.			Target - 4834N/0153E			4833N/0050E 5000N/0100E			12 x 500		
			52%			5000N/0240W 5042N/0230W								
R. OUT	CREW-NAME RANK NO.		Captures German docs. KE 8793											
P.I.A.	PILOT	Dombais P.C.H.												
AL HOME		Auss 410150 P10 8												
R.	NAV.	Auss 425728 T10												
SEA		Norris R. 9. Desc												
D.A.	W.O.P.	1102554 Sgt b. Beauvais												
	FE.	1599730. Sgt												
	RA.	Pamerson L.S.												
		N2 415036 715												
	R.U.	Stephen S.C. Desc												
	R.O.	Auss 25190. H10												
	R.D.	Auss 297567/845												
		(Hyson)												
		3 unknown dead												

NARRATIVE		MAKER	DATE TO SQ.	No. OF OPS.
<p>Place of loss... 12m. W. Lorraine. 20km S. Beauvais</p> <p>cause of loss... high fighter.</p> <p>uniform % destroyed 100%</p> <p>has all landed... Crashed. burst into flames.</p>				
		DAMAGE		
		COMBATS		

The source of this report completion is quoted as: -

Captured German docs. KE 8793

German Night Fighter records confirm that Hauptmann Fritz Söthe and his crew did indeed shoot down two bombers in quick succession on that fateful night. According to their sources, the first was shot down at 01.50 in zone TE - UE, a night fighter zone, north of Paris at 3000 metres. The second was some 4 minutes later in zone UE 1; area Méru, no height is given. These victories were confirmed as his 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> over Allied aircraft in the night fighter role.

1. June 1944: Film Chef für Ausz. und Disziplin: C. 2027. N / Teil II

01.06.44	Fw. Willi Morlock C. 2027/II	3./NJG 1 Anerk: 68	Lockheed	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 km. S.E. Tholen: 2.000 m.	01.10	i.O.
01.06.44	Fw. Willi Morlock C. 2027/II	3./NJG 1 Anerk: 88	Halifax	<input type="checkbox"/> KG 2 auf See: 1.700 m. (off Walcheren)	01.41	i.O.
01.06.44	Hptm. Fritz Söthe C. 2027/II	Stab II./NJG 4 Anerk: 14	4-mot. Flg.	<input type="checkbox"/> TE-UE: 3.000 m. (area N. Paris)	01.50	i.O.
01.06.44	Hptm. Fritz Söthe C. 2027/II	Stab II./NJG 4 Anerk: 15	4-mot. Flg.	<input type="checkbox"/> UE 1: no height (Méru)	01.54	i.O.
01.06.44	Hptm. Hubert Raüh C. 2027/II	Stab II./NJG 4 Anerk: 4	Lancaster	<input type="checkbox"/> BD 6: 7 km. W. Rambouillet at 3.000 m.	02.05	i.O.
01.06.44	Oblt. Ernst Drünkler C. 2027/II	1./NJG 5 Anerk: 16	Lancaster	<input type="checkbox"/> BD 4-5 links: 2.700 m. (Rambouillet)	02.05	i.O.
01.06.44	Hptm. Paul Zorner C. 2027/II	Stab III./NJG 5 Anerk: 10	4-mot. Flg.	<input type="checkbox"/> Villeguines-Anmont: 3.000 m.	02.35	i.O.
01.06.44	Lt. Keller C. 2027/II	9./NJG 5 Anerk: 17	4-mot. Flg.	<input type="checkbox"/> RD at 2.200 m. (N. Aumale)	02.52	i.O.
MTO: operations off Crete:						
01.06.44	Ofw. Chlezka C. 2027/II	4.(See)/BFGr. 126 Anerk: 2	Beaufighter	<input type="checkbox"/> off Heraklion: 80 m. (Crete)	18.10	i.O.
01.06.44	Ofhr. Rupp C. 2027/II	4.(See)/BFGr. 126 Anerk: 3	Beaufighter	<input type="checkbox"/> off Heraklion: 80 m. (Crete)	18.11	i.O.
01.06.44	Ofw. Knorth C. 2027/II	4.(See)/BFGr. 126 Anerk: 1	Beaufighter	<input type="checkbox"/> off Heraklion: 100 m. (Crete)	18.10	i.O.
01.06.44	Uffz. Häßler C. 2027/II	4.(See)/BFGr. 126 Anerk: 5	Beaufighter	<input type="checkbox"/> off Heraklion: 100 m. (Crete)	18.12	i.O.

**Above**, the night fighter records showing the 2 claims made by Hptm Fritz Söthe. **Below**, an artists impression of the aircraft that he was using on the night. His aircraft markings would have been 3C +? M (? = either C,D,E,F or G)



**Below and Next Page**. Two photographs of Messerschmitt Bf110-G showing the



large radar arrays and the gun blisters containing the cannon armament.



Hauptmann Söthe went on to survive a crash on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1944 at Rozay-en-Brien when he was only slightly injured along with Uffz. Brönies and Uffz. Enke, who was severely injured.

Following a short recovery period, (trained Luftwaffe pilots were by now much in demand), he returned to flying with Brönies and a new gunner Uffz. Christian Sabel from Dusseldorf. Throughout the rest of that summer and into the early autumn this reformed crew continued to shoot down victims. Eventually they amassed over 20 victories and Söthe was awarded the Knights Cross in Gold during September of that same year. By then the night-fighters, along with much of the German armed forces, were being withdrawn towards home soil to make its final desperate attempts at defending the Fatherland.

**Below** A record of airfields and aircraft used by II/NJG4 from their formation in April 1942 until the end of the war. Yellow highlight shows them stationed at Coulommiers in June, and the blue highlight, their withdrawal during September to German soil.

4.42 - 5.42	Laupheim	XII. Fliegerkorps	Bf 110
5.42 - 9.42	Rheine	3. JD	Bf 110, Do 217
9.42 - 1.44	St. Dizier*	3. JD 4. JD (from 9.43)	Bf 110, Do 217
1.44 - 25.2.44	Fassberg*		Bf 110
25.2.44 - 16.3.44	St. Dizier*	4. JD	Bf 110
16.3.44 - 8.5.44	Dijon*		Bf 110
8.5.44 - 8.44	Coulommiers	5. JD	Bf 110
8.44 - 11.44	Frankfurt/Rhein-Main	Jafü Mittelrhein	Bf 110, Ju 88G
11.44 - 3.45	Gütersloh**	Jafü Mittelrhein	Bf 110, Ju 88G
3.45 - 5.45	?	2. JD?	Ju 88G

Hauptmann Fritz Söthe and his crew were to play only a small part in this final struggle. On 28<sup>th</sup> September 1944 whilst flying a Junkers JU88G they crashed near Lambrecht, Neustadt a.d. Weinstrasse, Germany. Fritz Söthe was killed outright; Brönies and Sabel were severely wounded and are believed to have subsequently died as a result of their injuries.

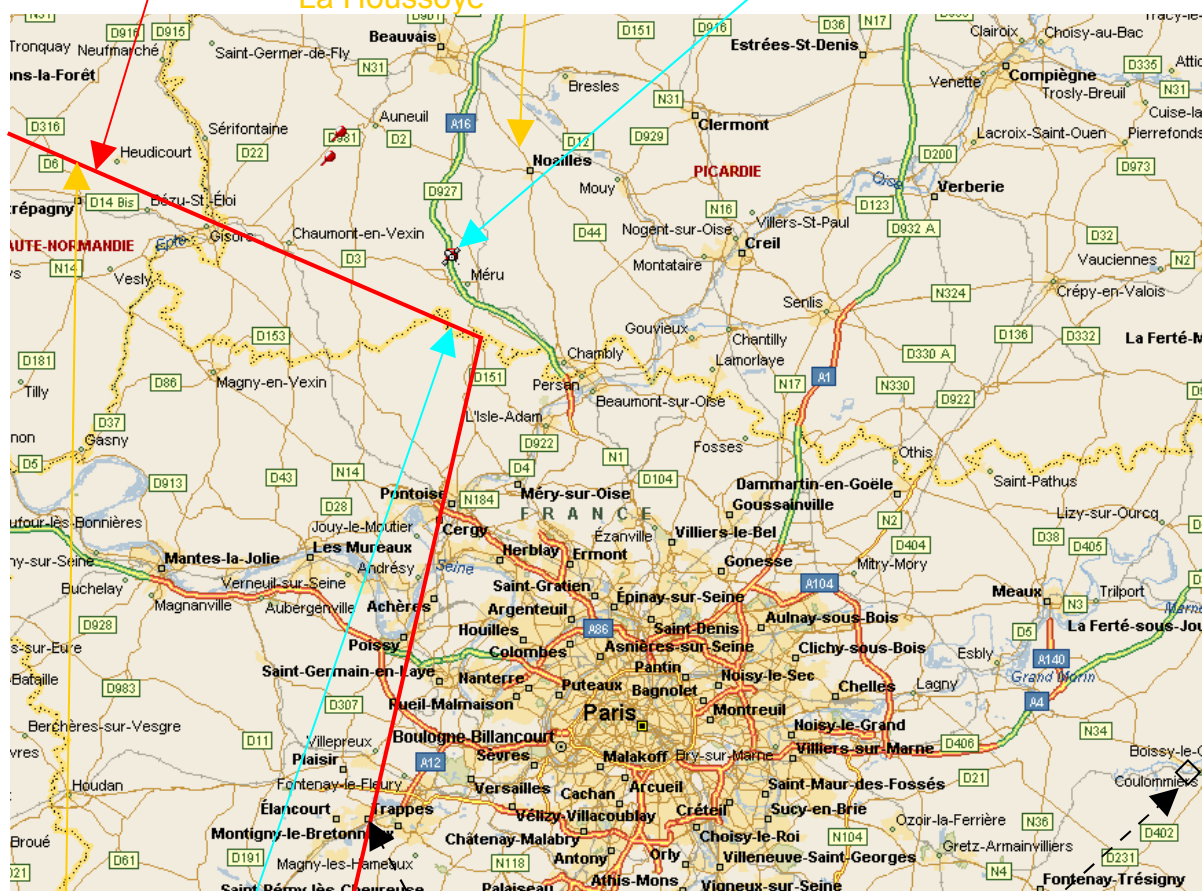
**BELOW**

This map shows the major points of interest for the night of 31<sup>st</sup> May/1<sup>st</sup> June 1944.

**Inbound track and bombing run.**

**Crash site of ND926 between Porcheux & La Houssoye**

**Crash site of LM121 at Lormaison**



**Interception points of ND926 and LM121.**

**Target**

**German airfield**

According to one statistic that I read, the average crew in Bomber Command would manage to complete seven and a half operations.

The 'rookie' crews (less than 10 operations) in the second wave were more likely to get the chop than the more experienced crews.

With almost half of their 8<sup>th</sup> operation over, having been found by the predatory night fighter, they were destined to become the perfect statistic.



An aerial photograph taken recently of the tiny village of Lormaison. It shows the track of the falling aircraft over the Postolle farm to the point of impact where the modern day A16 Amiens to Paris route cuts the landscape. All the arable land in the picture belongs to the Postolle family today.

The photograph also shows the village cemetery that was their initial resting place and is now the site of a memorial to the whole crew.

So ended the lives of sixteen brave and in most cases, young men who had each fought and died for their countries and causes. Each with his own desires to rid their world of what they perceived as an enemy.

At some moment during their short and hectic lives they had all been brought together in space and time one night in June 1944. In that instant these totally different and unequally matched adversaries had been pitched into a one on one battle. Each was following his orders and was playing to his set of rules, in a set of wartime circumstances they each found themselves. The outcome could have been so very different but the odds on this occasion were definitely stacked in favour of the fighter.

On that night, one might say that the crew of C for Charlie never stood a chance.

However, the story does not end here, in a way, it is just a beginning.