

# Chapter 7

## Supplementary Information

It was originally believed that another Australian, Flight Sergeant S A Stephens, had perished when the bomber crashed, as he was recorded as the mid-upper gunner on the loss record originally. The confusion may be just a clerical error or maybe Nystrom and Stephens swapped at the last minute. In that case F/Sgt Stephens was a very lucky young man. Another possible reason for this confusion could be that their service numbers both ended with 199 and this might have led to an incorrect identification if the dog tags were badly damaged. He is believed to have completed his tour of operations and returned home.

From available Australian records (copies of family letters that I was able to obtain through the Australian archives in Canberra) it would appear that there was some confusion during the burial of the crew. They had originally been interred in the small village cemetery at Lormaison. However, another aircraft, ND926 of 622 Squadron seems to have been recorded as the crashed Lancaster. It was recorded as falling on the land of M. Postolle, the mayor of the village at that time. The Germans would not allow the villagers to be involved in the removal of the crew's remains. M. Letot later removed the wreckage from the crash site. In the meantime an unknown person had scratched the (wrong) aircraft number onto a piece of metal that was then placed on the graves in Lormaison.

The timing for all this activity, according to the known records, was 23.30 on the 31<sup>st</sup> May 1944. Initially these timings lead me to think that ND 926 and LM121 were not on the same raid. That or they had each been part of one of the two waves that attacked the target that night. However, once the second (ND926) loss card was obtained and the Form 540 for 622 Squadron was checked, it became obvious that the time differences were because of the many different methods used to record time during the war years.

In Britain we were using Double British Summer Time; this was two hours *ahead* of continental Europe. Both Lancasters had taken off from Mildenhall just before midnight DBST (ND926 at 11.45 and LM121 at 11.57). From my research, it would have taken them approximately two hours to reach the points where they were shot down. This is recorded as 01.50 and 01.54 in the German records. After the war these German records were adjusted to be in line with British timings and so mirror the times from British records. The times given in the Australian records of communication regarding the crash and burial of the crew are the French local times. These would have been two hours *behind* those given in both the British and German records that became available after the war.

Further research has discovered that ND926 was indeed shot down by a German night fighter although it was, possibly incorrectly, identified as a JU88. No record exists for a JU88 unit claiming a victory that night on this raid's aircraft. This almost certainly accounts for the two claims made by Fritz Söthe for that night.

The tail-gunner (Flt /Lt L F Berry) of ND926 was a lucky man that night as he was thrown out of the aircraft as it exploded in mid air and parachuted to safety. He

evaded capture and returned to the U.K. with the assistance of the Resistance.

The wreckage from that aircraft came down over a large area from Porcheaux to le Houssoye. Six bodies of the crew were recovered and buried like those of the crew from LM 121 in a local cemetery. Later all the bodies were exhumed and taken to Marissel French National Cemetery at Beauvais where they were subsequently laid to rest with the French Nationals. There are also 19 British and Dominion casualties of the First World War 1914 -18 and 158 Commonwealth soldiers and airmen of the Second World War. During the transfer from Lormaison to Beauvais a clerical error again caused the crew to be split up. Eventually this confusion was sorted out and the seven members of Geoff's crew and the six from ND926 lie at peace. Sadly, because of this confusion, Frank Reid lies to the left of the three ND926 crew headstones (there are two names per headstone in their case).

It seems both ironic and sad that the tail gunner, who, by virtue of his allotted task, had spent his life separated from the crew by physical distance, has ended up separated in this way. It is almost certain that, because both crews came from the same base in England they will have known each other. So it is somewhat fitting that they should all rest now shoulder to shoulder as both crews fought and so sadly died.