

Charles ROBERSON & Robert BROWN

16 weeks in occupied France

April 24 - August 15, 1944

On April 24 - around noon - the whole crew of a B-17 bailed out while on their way back from Oberpfaffenhofen, Germany. The plane had become out of control after it was hit by flak. All crew members survived, but four members were immediately arrested. HARVEY, RULE, BROWN, RADER, McMANUS and ROBERSON managed to avoid immediate capture. For STURAK, SMITH, VANN and ATKINS, the war was over, and they were sent to POW camps in Germany.

The plane crashed near a farm, in the small village of Plancy l'Abbaye, in the department of "Aube".



General map of the crash location (90 miles East of Paris) and the maquis camp

ROBERSON landed near the small city of Arcis sur Aube (a few miles east of the crash), and met the local chief of resistance, Mr BERNARD, the next day.

At the same time, BROWN, McMANUS and RULE were helped by Mr HATAT. He lived in the village of La Chapelle Lasson, close to the location of the crash. They stayed with his family until early June. Marcel HATAT was a member of the resistance. A collaborator of the Germans had seen he was hiding pilots. He was denounced, and arrested by the Gestapo a few days after the airmen left.

On April 26, ROBERSON was moved to the village of "Saint Mards en Othe", where he met Mr & Mrs DERIVERY.

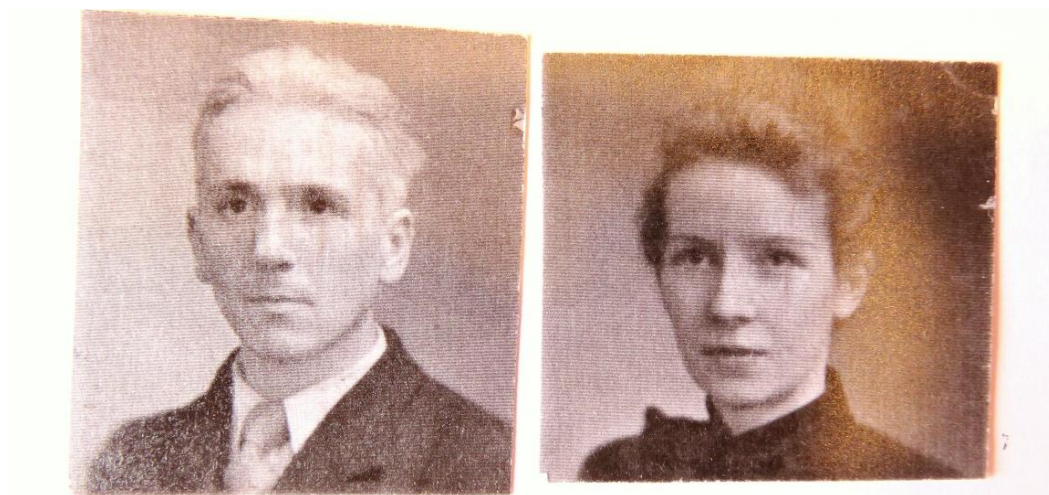
Marcel DERIVERY could speak English fluently, which was very unusual in the region at that time. That's probably why many other airmen (both RAF and USAAF) were sent to Saint Mards en Othe. Marcel would

first make sure the airmen were genuine allies, as it was known that the German were sending spies (fake evaders) to infiltrate the networks. Marcel was helped by Mr COUILLARD and Mr LEBRUN, who were very active in the resistance and helped many downed airmen.

Within six weeks, 14 airmen who had been shot down in the region of Troyes were sent to the DERIVERY's. ROBERSON was the first one. Obviously, Marcel could not lodge them all in his house, and it was decided that the men would join the Maquis nearby, a few miles south of the village.



ROBERSON (3rd on the right), with three other pilots hiding in the maquis



Marcel & Genevieve DERIVERY

At the beginning of June, five members of his crew arrived in Saint Mards en Othe : Bill HARVEY, Jack RULE, Cornelius McMANUS and Robert BROWN. With ROBERSON, they participated in the activities of the maquis, including managing air drops, guarding the camp, etc... The maquis of Saint Mards received supplies from England, including weapons that would be later used during the liberation of Paris.

Meanwhile, the number of French resistants in the Maquis grew quickly. Some of these men happened to be traitors working for the Gestapo, and they gathered important information about the camp.

On June 20th, the Germans massively attacked the Maquis, and killed 27 men among the resistants. All the airmen but one managed to flee (Georges MORLEY was killed in the battle). Charles ROBERSON and Robert BROWN decided to stay together, and went westward.

Most of the other airmen stayed in the same region, and were hidden by local population until the Allies reached them.

BROWN and ROBERSON walked until they reached the small village of Serbonnes, where Mr & Mrs BOUCHY lodged them for two days. This family was part of a resistance network, and they have sheltered many other airmen, in 1943 and 1944.

The two airmen were directed to another maquis camp, in Valence en Brie. There, they briefly met Henry WOODRUM and Walter KOZICKI (both USAAF officers), who were hiding in the maquis with a small group of resistants. They did not want to stay with them, and walked toward another village nearby, Fontaine Le Port.

On July 12th, Mr Paul DESARTHE, a cabinetmaker from Fontaine le Port, saw them hiding in the nearby woods. They were tired and starving. They accepted his help, and spent a few days with him.



In Fontaine le Port, with the family of Paul DESARTHE

Mr DESARTHE, with the help of Mr MILLET (the mayor of Fontaines le Port) contacted a member of the resistance from Nangis. The pilots were given bicycles, and went there. They stayed with Mr FRANCOIS for another week. Mr FRANCOIS was a blacksmith, living in the village of Fontains.

On the 19th of July, both men were brought to the small town of Bannost, where they met Roy ALLEN, another B-17 pilot whose plane had been shot down on June 14th. Bannost was the starting point of a new journey to Paris (by bus, then by train). Police inspector Robert LEDUC was their guide, and he was travelling with Mr and Mrs BERTHAUD.



One full month to reach Paris from the Maquis of Saint-Mards-en-Othe

While in Paris, they were brought by police car to the apartment of Mr Georges BANLIER, another key member of the police in Paris. The three airmen stayed there for about two weeks, at 73 avenue du general Bizot, in the south-east of Paris. During his stay, Roy ALLEN was suffering from kidney stones, and he had to go to the hospital, with the risk of being discovered and arrested.

Mr BANLIER stated that the three airmen were always willing to help him with his resistance activities, and they took part in risky missions, preparing for the liberation of Paris.

The airmen had to move when Mr BANLIER suspected that his apartment was being watched, at the beginning of August. Another policeman – Mr Roger MALVAULT - took them over, and they stayed for another week at his home, in the city of Saint Maur, a few miles east of Paris.

Finally, on August 10, they were sent back to Paris. Mr PREVOST, an other policeman from the same resistance network (“Honneur de la Police”), welcomed them in his apartment, 20 Boulevard Sebastopol. Georges PREVOST was responsible for an evasion network, and has sheltered more than 50 airmen in his apartment.



Georges PREVOST

Unfortunately, his organization was infiltrated by a traitor, a member of the Gestapo who pretended to be an English member of the Intelligence Service. The airmen knew him as “Captain Jack”. PREVOST trusted him, and he could not imagine this man, who spoke perfectly English, could be a traitor.

On August 11, the day after they arrived in PREVOST’s apartment, the traitor – whose real name was Guy de MARCHERET – received orders from the gestapo HQ : the evasion network was to be destroyed. Charles and Robert were arrested along with Georges PREVOST, his fiancée, his sister and her husband. Roy ALLEN was also arrested the same day.

Georges PREVOST was deported to Buchenwald, in the same train as the other 168 airmen, on August 15th. He died in deportation, as well as his brother in law, Jean ROCHER.



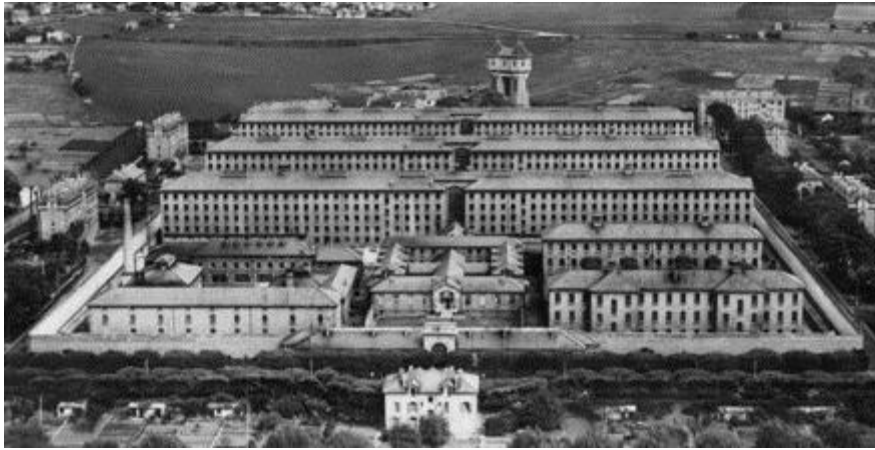
Memorial plaque – 20 Boulevard Sebastopol

Guy Glèbe d’Eu, comte de MARCHERET was responsible for the arrest of many airmen, French resistants and also jews.

De MARCHERET became famous for being responsible of another terrible event which happened only a few days after BROWN and ROBERSON were arrested : He had organized a trap that resulted in the arrest and slaughter of 35 young resistants who were engaged in the battle for the liberation of Paris, and who were desperately in need of guns to fight the enemy. They all died in the “cascade du bois de Boulogne”, in the most terrible way. That story was related in the famous movie “Is Paris Burning?” as well as the book of the same name.

He was caught in Denmark in 1945, trialed in France, and sentenced to death in 1949.

The airmen were sent to the Gestapo HQ, rue des Saussaies, where they were interrogated and beaten. The German knew they were airmen, but considered them as terrorists : “Terrorflieger”. From there, the Germans sent them to the prison of Fresnes, where they stayed until August 15.



The Fresno prison during the war

The living conditions in the prison were very hard, but it was nothing compared to what they would experience in Buchenwald.

The following documents were found by the US troops when they freed Buchenwald in 1945. Charles ROBERSON and Robert BROWN were not considered as American airmen (letter "A" was crossed out intentionally), but political prisoners.

Reisekarte

Häftl. Art A Alte Nr.: _____ Häftl. Nr.: 7832 ✓

Fam.- Namen ROBERSON ✓ Rufnamen CHARLES W.

Geburtsdag: 14.3.1919 Geburtsort: MT. CARMEL, MO.

Rel. Polit. verh/led/verw/Kinder _____ gesch/ Staatsangehörigkeit USA

Letzter Wohnort: _____

Vater: _____ Beruf: _____

Mutter: _____

Ehegatte: _____

Nächst. Angehörigen: _____

Eingewiesen am _____ in KL _____ d. Stapo/Kripo/Sipo _____

Überstellt am 20.8.44 an KL B

Vorstrafen 1 mal kriminell 1 mal politisch

Sonstige Bemerkungen: CHARLES W. ROBERSON 16052210 19. Okt. 1944 Sequest. AAF

20.8.1944
BDS Paris

Gefangenenkarte

Häftl. Art A Alte Nr.: _____ Häftl. Nr.: 78295 ✓

Fam.- Namen Brown ✓ Rufnamen Robert H.

Geburtsdag: _____ Geburtsort: _____

Rel. _____ verh/led/verw/Kinder _____ gesch/ Staatsangehörigkeit _____

Letzter Wohnort: _____

Vater: _____ Beruf: 2nd Lieutenant

Mutter: _____

Ehegatte: NR 0-521 **20.8.1944**
BDS Paris

Nächst. Angehörigen: _____

Eingewiesen am _____ in KL _____ d. Stapo/Kripo/Sipo _____

Überstellt am _____ an KL _____

Vorstrafen 1 mal kriminell 1 mal politisch

Sonstige Bemerkungen: 2nd Lieutenant ROBERT H. BROWN SERIAL NO. 0-521726 19. Okt. 1944 Sequest. AAF

Captured German records – Buchenwald records