

Flt Lt Arnold Roseland. 442 (Canadian) Squadron RAF

Ronald Roseland-Barnes has been in touch with FONFA to tell this story.

We are most grateful to him for passing it on, and for his interest in our activities.

No 442 (Canadian) Squadron RAF, flying Spitfire Vs and IXs, formed in early 1944 and moved to Holmsley South airfield during March of that year. Among their number was Canadian Flt Lt Arnold W Roseland, who commanded the Squadron's B Flight. The Squadron supported the momentous actions during June 1944. During the late afternoon of 13 July, Flt Lt Roseland lost his life while on an armed reconnaissance mission over France. He left a son, Ronald, aged 11 months at the time of his death.

1999. All Ronald Roseland-Barnes knew of his father was that he had died shortly after D-Day while flying his Spitfire over France. He had no idea that a Normandy town still revered his father as a war hero, that they had dubbed him 'the unknown Canadian' and had erected a monument to him on the 50th anniversary of D-Day. He did not know that a man who had seen his father crash had been trying to find him.

Pierre Behier was 18 when he witnessed the dogfight in which Arnold Roseland was shot down. He watched the Spitfire chase a German aircraft into the clouds and witnessed the damaged aircraft as it fell to earth. The pilot managed to escape from the cockpit, but his parachute was caught by the wing of the aircraft and he was flung to the ground. The aircraft crashed in a farmer's field at the village of Saint Martin-de-Mailloc. Had the impact occurred thirty feet in another direction, the Spitfire would have destroyed a house in which 22 people were hiding, including an 11-year-old who was later to become Behier's wife.

The German troops arriving at the scene quickly confiscated the dead pilot's wallet and personal items, and only one clue to his identity remained, secured by the French police - a lighter, etched with the word 'Roseland'. Behier and the villagers did not know whether this word indicated a name, or perhaps a place. The French gave the pilot a funeral and buried him as an unknown airman. Twelve months after the funeral, the Canadian Air Force moved the grave to join 4,000 others at the Canadian Bretteville-Sur-Laize Cemetery at Cintheaux.

Years later, Pierre Behier became Mayor of Saint Martin-de-Mailloc. In June 1994, the 50th anniversary of D-Day, the town erected a memorial to their unknown pilot.

Behier never stopped searching for the airman's identity. He wished also to identify the family of the pilot and contact them. Finally, his persistence paid off. He and a French police officer managed to find records in the Canadian National Archives in Ottawa which disclosed the identity of the airman. They then wrote to the archives to enquire about any family.

Coincidentally, Ronald Roseland-Barnes' cousin from British Columbia had contacted the archives regarding information for a family tree. The organisation forwarded Behier's letter to her and she immediately sent it to her cousin.

Once the two men had been put in touch, Ronald Roseland-Barnes took up an offer from Pierre Behier to visit Saint Martin-de-Mailloc and travelled from Oakville, Ontario, with his two sons during July of this year. The Canadians stayed with the French family during their visit. Some of the elderly folk came forward to recount to the visitors their memories of the day of the crash.

One villager had found a photograph of Ronald's mother which, remarkably, had survived the years; another had acquired the dead pilot's wallet, and these two items were presented to Ronald during his stay. 'I haven't had a dry eye since', he confessed, 'it's unbelievable what has happened'. Ronald's son Keith said, 'There were a lot of people waiting to talk to us. I feel so honoured to be part of this family'. In addition to placing flowers at the Saint Martin-de-Mailloc memorial, father and sons were able to visit the grave of Flt Lt

Roseland. These events would have been impossible for them to fulfil without the determination of M Behier to bring a conclusion to the saga.