

# Acton man's 20-year quest ends

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The other five crew members remained in the wreckage of the bomber, buried in the dyke.

One of the crew members on that bomber was Flight Sergeant Joseph Thomas Lloyd LeBlanc, of the Royal Canadian Air Force, 78 Squadron (RAF).

The wreckage would be left undisturbed from that point on, as the two bodies that were found with the gun turret were interred in a nearby cemetery.

In 1983, a young man visited his family's home in Gaspé, Québec, and by some stroke of luck, he was given his grandmother's photo album and a stack of letters written by his uncles.

One uncle was Flight Sergeant Joseph Thomas Lloyd LeBlanc—and 28 of his letters were included in the bundle.

After reading the letters and studying the photos, Michael LeBlanc of Acton was bitten by the bug.

He had to learn as much as he could about his deceased uncle, whose remains lay with the wreckage of that Halifax bomber, somewhere in Holland.

LeBlanc learned all about his uncle's RCAF (Royal Canadian Air Force) career, from the day he enlisted in August 7, 1942, until that fateful encounter with the night fighter.

"I learned my uncle (Joseph) enlisted after he heard his brother

Leonard was named missing after the attack at Dieppe," said Michael LeBlanc. "Uncle Leonard eventually showed up in England—I'm still trying to track down that story."

The bundle of letters and photos would be the start of a 20 year quest on Michael's part to uncover all the information he could about his uncle's death.

Starting with a visit to Holland in 1990 to visit the crash site, LeBlanc was fortunate enough to track down some eye witnesses of the crash, and in doing so, found the exact location of the buried wreckage.

The 1990 trip would mark the beginning of several trips to Holland, to recover the remains of those five missing crew members and give them a fitting burial.

"The wreckage didn't really qualify for recovery," said LeBlanc, "In Holland, the criteria for recovery states they will only recover downed aircraft that were flying 'to a target', in case they still had some live munitions onboard, but not aircraft returning from a mission, like my uncle's plane."

In spite of the restriction, LeBlanc and some of the Dutch locals around the crash site were pushing for it to be recovered.

"After being turned down numerous times, I was prepared to let it be," said LeBlanc, "And simply have the site marked with some sort of a marker. But Anton Vanderpluijm, whose family still

owns the land there, was determined to have it recovered."

The recovery discussion soon became a media event in Holland as the local municipality discussed the merits of recovery. The request was still repeatedly denied.

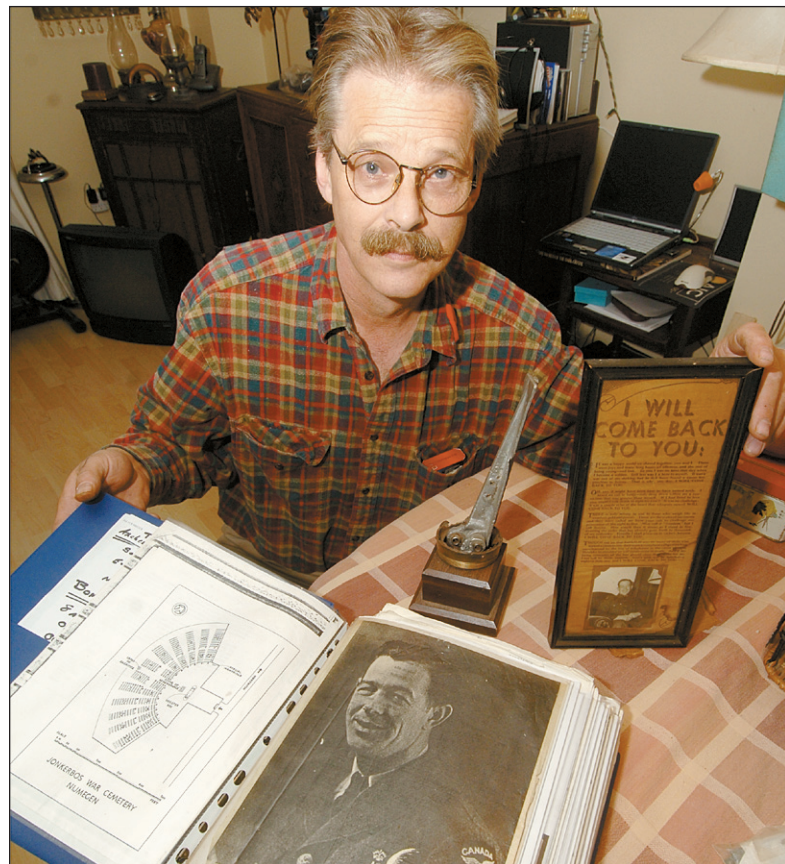
But after a top ranking officer in the Dutch Air Force became interested, and he later conveyed his interest to Prince Bernard of the Royal Family, it was eventually approved in 2004.

The next hurdle was the cost. "Recovering WW2 aircraft is not cheap," said LeBlanc, "It was estimated that the cost would around 250,000 Euros, and the local municipality was required to raise 25,000 Euros. They outdid themselves—in 10 days they raised 35,000 Euros."

Funds for the recovery operation were raised through a combination of private donors and the municipal government of the nearby municipality of Werkendam. The excavation lasted five weeks in 2005 and was carried out by the Royal Netherlands Air Force Salvage Team. During the operation, approximately 80 percent of the wreckage was found, including the remains of the five crew members who went down with the aircraft.

The project also came in under the 250,000 Euro budget.

A final culmination of the project occurred in September 27 of this year, as the five recovered crew members and the original



Michael LeBlanc of Acton displays his extensive research and memorabilia collected during his search to find his late uncle's resting place in Holland. His uncle, F/Sgt Joseph LeBlanc was shot down over Holland after completing a bombing run over Germany. The remains were interred in Jonkerbos War Cemetery last September.

Photo by Ted Brown

two were buried at Jonkerbos War Cemetery, near Nijmegen, The Netherlands, following a funeral service at Lourdes Kerk Church, Jonkerbos. A memorial was also unveiled in Hank, in the Municipality of Werkendam.

"I'm not sure if my uncle was one of the five recovered or the

other unidentified airman who was found with Sgt Butler the day after the crash," said LeBlanc, "My gut feeling is he was found with Butler. It doesn't really matter now, as all seven have been buried with full military honours in Jonkerbos War Cemetery, and that's the important thing."

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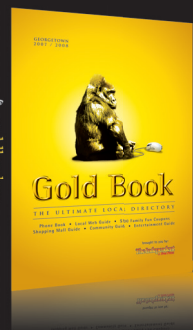
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