
July 2023



The Sentinel

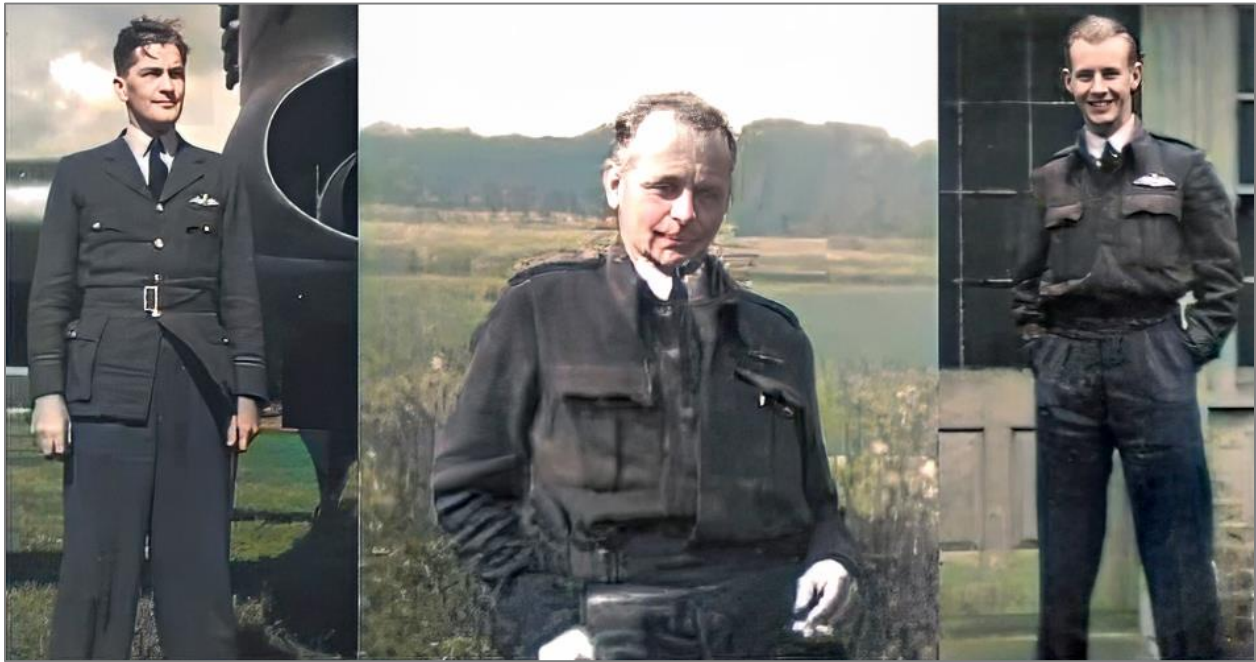
A Special Issue



266 (RHODESIA) SQUADRON RAF

*When you go home, tell them of us and say: for your tomorrows
these gave their today.*

~John Maxwell Edmonds
1875-1958



Squadron Leader Alexander Stewart 'Sandy' MacIntyre
Flight Lieutenant John 'Johnnie' Small
Flight Lieutenant Frederick Brian Biddulph

The Cemetery at Le Folgoët in Finistère, western France contains the Commonwealth War Graves of two Royal Air Force Pilots from 266 (Rhodesia) Squadron, who were shot down during combat with the Luftwaffe, on Sunday, 15th August 1943. The squadron originally flew Spitfires (one of which – tail number P7350 - survives to this day in the RAF Battle of Britain Flight) but had recently been equipped with the Hawker Typhoon.

The dogfight took place over the communes of Lesneven, Ploudaniel, Saint-Frégant, and Le Folgoët and many villagers witnessed it, some of whom are still alive. The three downed Rhodesian RAF pilots were: Squadron Leader Alexander Stewart MacIntyre, Flight Lieutenant John Small, and Flight Lieutenant Frederick Brian Biddulph. They were, respectively, just 24, 32, and 21 years old.

Sandy MacIntyre and John Small were buried with full military honours in Le Folgoët Communal Cemetery. Remarkably, a German Army chaplain led the funeral cortège and twelve soldiers of the German Army carried the two coffins, while a further sixty soldiers provided the Honour Guard. They were accompanied by the villagers and townspeople of the local communes. Philomène Paul from Saint-Frégant, whose own husband was

lost in May 1940 serving in the French Air Force, had been permitted to lay her wreath of local flowers on Sandy's body, beside the crashed plane. According to witness accounts, Brian Biddulph was seen to bale out, as his plane fell into the sea, but his body was never recovered. Two German pilots - Oberfeldwebel Georg Sievert and Oberfeldwebel Hans Gryz were also lost during the same engagement and are buried in the Lesneven/Ploudaniel German War Cemetery.

Sandy MacIntyre's parents established contact with the local people caring for the grave and members of the family had visited the graves in 2013. The sacrifice of these young men in the cause of freedom is not forgotten and local people take very seriously the commemoration of those who gave their lives in their liberation from the Nazis. Twice a year, the Mayor, veterans, and local school children lay wreaths on 8th May (Victory in Europe Day) and 11th November (Remembrance Day). In this way, their story is passed on to future generations.

They came from far away to liberate France. They are not forgotten.

This year marked the 80th anniversary of the combat and Brian Biddulph's name has been added to the memorial in the Le Folgoët Cemetery; a special commemoration was held on 8th May and family members of the three downed pilots were present. The three men have been made formally "citizens" of Le Folgoët and the Mayor awarded medals of the Le Folgoët Community to their families.

In July last year, the Rhodesian Services Association was contacted by John Duncan who, together with his daughter, Vicky, runs a Facebook page called *Remembrance in North Finistère*, which raises awareness about local events commemorating the Allies' contribution in the two World Wars. John, who has a home nearby, had been asked by the Mayor of Le Folgoët to see if he could track down any relatives of the airmen who died. Members of Sandy MacIntyre's family had been located, but those of Johnnie Small and Brian Biddulph were proving more difficult to trace. The aim of the search was the hope that some of them may be able to attend the commemoration of the 80th anniversary.

These are the stories of the research efforts of John Duncan and of various people in France, Scotland, England, New Zealand, and the United States. The involvement of the Rhodesian Services Association was crucial to the success of this endeavour.



Squadron Leader Alexander Stewart 'Sandy' MacIntyre

Service number: 80046

One of John's sources of information was Beryl Salt's *Pride of Eagles*, which recounts Sandy MacIntyre's early career, until his transfer to the UK in mid-1942. Further research eventually led John to Sandy's nephew, Don, who moved to England some time ago, but frequently visits his brother in South Africa. Don had asked a friend, Joe Gröger, who worked for several several years in South Africa, to research the background to his uncle's last flight (MacIntyre had just taken over as Squadron Leader). Joe's 17-page document is the most extensive coverage of all the combatants involved in the action and the action itself. It includes correspondence between Sandy's father and the local Bodennec family, who took personal care of the two graves.

Claire Bodennec whose own son, Léon, a year older than Sandy, was killed in Tunisia in February 1943 just six months before Sandy. Léon was fighting with the Free French Forces, alongside the Allies. The family did not locate his body until 1948, and they had it repatriated to Le Folgoët. On 8th May this year, the Royal British Legion laid a wreath on his tomb, with the inscription, "To a former comrade in arms".

Sandy MacIntyre's entry in the Rhodesian Services Association Roll of Honour is as follows:

Aged 24. Son of Alexander Stewart MacIntyre and Katherine Lawson MacIntyre of Knysna, Cape Province, South Africa. In October 1938, he was selected for pilot training in the Southern Rhodesia Air Unit on No 3 Elementary Training Course in Salisbury. He completed his training in England and was among a draft of officers to the No 1 Squadron SRAF in Nairobi on 22/11/1939. This squadron was then absorbed into the Royal Air Force as 237 (Rhodesia) Squadron. He took part in the Abyssinian campaign and the 1941 advance on Benghazi. He transferred to 266 (Rhodesia) Squadron and became its Commanding Officer. Unit: 266 (Rhodesia) Sqn. Crew Position: Pilot. Aircraft type: Typhoon Ib JP492. Operational Theatre: France. He was killed during air operations. About seven enemy aircraft were sighted near the target over France and six aircraft of the Rhodesian Squadron turned to engage them. Sqn Ldr MacIntyre was shot down early in the encounter by a FW190 which closed to about 50 yards. This aircraft was engaged by Sandy's No 2 Flt Sgt Charles Erasmus who shot it down in flames. This was the same sortie

as Flt Lt Frederick Brian Biddulph and Flt Lt John Small, both also killed on this day and who are also recorded on the Rhodesian Roll of Honour section of this project. He is buried in the Le Folgoët Communal Cemetery, France. He was born on 5/12/1918 in Maseru, Basutoland.



Flight Lieutenant Frederick Brian Biddulph

Service numbers: 80153 and 778501

John Duncan has always been intrigued by Brian Biddulph as the 'forgotten one' of the three pilots. He crashed into the sea, his body was never recovered, and his Commonwealth War Graves Commission entry is missing any details of his family. Don MacIntyre referred John to Salt's *Pride of Eagles*, which has a footnote about Brian (and Johnnie Small). Enquiries online at his former school in Harare, Prince Edward, and their alumni site, received no response. By chance, John found a reference to his younger brother, Edward 'John' Biddulph, killed in a training accident in March 1942. This led him to the

Rhodesian Services Association and our databases of detailed information on those who served in the Rhodesian Armed Forces.

The name Biddulph is familiar to many Rhodesians and Zimbabweans, as the well-known removals company, based in Harare. Their website states that they've been in operation for over 90 years. Founded in 1928 by Fred Biddulph in Salisbury (now Harare), the firm is in its fourth generation of family ownership and is the largest family-owned removal company in the region.

We passed all this information on to John Duncan who made contact, via LinkedIn, with two cousins of Brian Biddulph - Andrew and Ryan Gibbons. Ryan's mother sent John photos and videos of the Prince Edward School Chapel and War Memorial, as well as of Biddulph Street in Harare, which is named after them. Ryan sent extracts of the Biddulph family history, a privately published edition going back to 1820, when the family arrived in Africa. Ryan is a senior manager at Biddulph's and, in the past, has researched both Brian and John Biddulph. He has visited John's grave near Cirencester, as well as the memorial at Runnymede. Ryan joined the 80th anniversary commemoration on 8th May from South Africa and, with the Mayor, formally unveiled Brian's name on the war memorial.

Brian Biddulph's entry in the Rhodesian Services Association Roll of Honour is as follows:

Aged 21. No known grave. Son of Frederick Charles Biddulph and Mabel Price Biddulph of Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia. According to his Death Notice entry, his name was registered at birth as Roland Fredericks and subsequently changed. Unit: 266 (Rhodesia) Sqn. Crew Position Pilot. Aircraft type: Typhoon Ib, R8767. Operational Theatre: English Channel. Killed during air operations. He was on bomber escort duty and was shot down by a FW190 of JG2 over the English Channel near Guipavas. Lost on the same sortie as Flt Lt John Small and Sqn Ldr Alexander Stewart 'Sandy' McIntyre both of whom were Rhodesians and also listed on the Rhodesian Roll of Honour section of this project. He is named on the Runnymede Memorial, Egham, Surrey, England, Panel 119. He was born on 3/7/1922 in Johannesburg, South Africa. He is commemorated on the Roll of Honour at Prince Edward High School, Harare.



Flight Lieutenant John 'Johnnie' Small

Service numbers: 80149 and 778495

Tracking down relatives of Johnnie Small proved to be more challenging.

Johnnie's Commonwealth War Graves Commission entry contains scarce details of his family. It implies he was from Weymouth, where he married his wife, Kathleen, just three months earlier. John Duncan discovered she had passed away in 1996. She never remarried, and he appears as spouse on her death certificate. Neither the local RAF Association, nor the Royal British Legion, could supply further details and her care home had destroyed her records.

The footnote in *Pride of Eagles* simply notes that Johnnie Small came from Scotland and worked in the Rhodesian mines. John Duncan eventually found him on a passenger manifest for a ship returning to the UK in 1938, which gave the address he was visiting in Scotland. The 1911 census recorded this as the family home and revealed the existence of two older brothers.

The Small family was from Pitscottie in Fife, Scotland and John Duncan sought the help of a researcher at the Cupar Museum in Fife, who has expertise in local family history. Catherine Collins has produced some amazing research on the family's life in Scotland and she discovered that Johnnie's elder brother, David Wilson Small, had emigrated to Southern Rhodesia. He left Scotland in 1926 and farmed in Shamva, Norton, Umvuma, and the Que Que area. Presumably, this was the reason Johnnie went there, following

his brother onto a local farm in Shamva and then finding work in the expanding gold mines, nearby. There seems to be no record of the date he emigrated to Rhodesia, but in the book, *Rhodesian Eagles, 266 Squadron*, he is mentioned several times as having been a manager on a gold mine and *The Rhodesia Herald* mentions that he is from Shamva. It was also an area where, under Robert Mugabe, many white farmers were attacked and driven off the land:

From *The Financial Gazette* (Harare), 17th December 2015:

Tucked away in the farmlands of Shamva is a small shopping centre called David Small, which can easily pass for a homestead in an African village. It derives its name from a former commercial white farmer who was stampeded out of a nearby farm during the tumultuous 2000 land reform programme.

John Small's name appears on Shamva's Second World War Memorial, now sadly fallen into disrepair, with the engravings barely legible.

Our own search for the relatives of Johnnie Small began and ended on Facebook. A post on the excellent Facebook group *Zimbabwe & Rhodesia history 50 years or more back*, elicited responses from people who had known Johnnie's niece, Fiona Holderness, née Small, and mention of Robert 'Roy' Small, Fiona's brother; we were able to make contact with both of them.

Johnnie Small's entry in the Rhodesian Services Association Roll of Honour is as follows:

Aged 32. Son of Robert Small and Jessie Small; husband of Kathleen Olive Small of Weymouth, Dorsetshire, England. Unit: 266 (Rhodesia) Sqn. Crew Position: Pilot. Aircraft type: Typhoon Ib DN296. Operational Theatre: France. On the 10/01/1943 Flt Lt John Small claimed a Focke-Wulf Fw 190. He was killed during air operations when his aircraft was shot down by a Fw190 near Guipavas northeast of Brest during a circus over the English Channel. He was on the same sortie as Flt Lt Frederick Brian Biddulph and Sqn Ldr Alexander Stewart 'Sandy' McIntyre both of whom were Rhodesians killed on this same day and are on the Rhodesian Roll of Honour section of this project.

He is buried in the Le Folgoët Communal Cemetery, France (Northern Part). He is named on the Roll of Honour in St John's Church, Shamva, Southern Rhodesia. He was born on 24/03/1911 in Scoonie, Fifeshire, Scotland. The Royal Agricultural Show took place in Cupar in the 1920s and there was a Rhodesia stand, advertising farming opportunities in Southern Africa. John and his brothers attended the show and his elder brother David Wilson Small emigrated and set up in Shamva which was both a farming and gold mining area. It appears that John then joined him and found work in the mines, rising to Mine Manager by 1938. He was commissioned into the: Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.

The German Army Involvement

The burial of Sandy and Johnnie, with full military honours, on 17th August 1943 at Le Folgoët, was unusual. By contrast, the Occupation authorities adamantly refused to allow the body of Flight Lieutenant Samuel Millen from Wanganui, New Zealand to be buried in the local Treflez Churchyard. He was shot down on 16th December 1940, just off the coast of France, at Lannilis, Finistère, and his body was interred in a minefield in the Keremma dunes. Flowers were laid regularly on the grave by local people, at some risk to themselves, but in 1944 they reclaimed his remains and he was buried in the village churchyard. Some months after ordering the full military funeral honours for Sandy MacIntyre and Johnnie Small, Colonel Otto Jaeger, the German garrison commander, was relieved of his command. On 6th June 1944, he was recalled to command a "scratch unit", to counter the D-Day Landings. He was captured and sent to a POW camp in England and was among the last German officers to be released in 1948.

The President of the Le Folgoët French Veterans Association (UNC) sent John Duncan an extract from the diary of the Rector of the Le Folgoët Basilica:

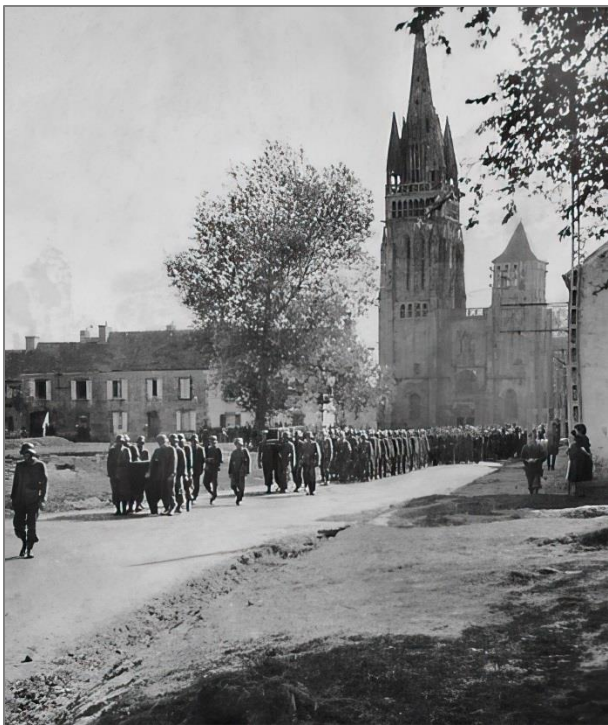
*DIARY OF CANNON J.M. GUÉGUEN – RECTOR OF THE BASILICA OF LE FOLGOËT
AUGUST 1943 The war continued between the powers of Germany and Italy on the one hand, and the Allied powers, England, the United States of America and Russia on the other. On Sunday 15 August 1943, at the end of the Service to celebrate the vows of Louis XIII, a furious and rapid battle took place over our heads between German and English aircraft. (Two) Germans fell, one at Folgoët, 200 metres from the Chapel, another at Ploudaniel, Almost at the same time, two English planes fell, one in a field near Kergolestroc, the other near the manor of Penmarc'h.*

The German soldiers asked me to perform a religious ceremony in the church before the burial fixed for the next day at 10 o'clock. I decided to perform a solemn, first-class ceremony in their honour. Not knowing whether the airmen were Catholic or Protestant, I could not sing mass for them, but we sang the first night of the Office of the Dead. Beforehand, we held a funeral vigil in the church at nine o'clock in the evening on Monday 16 August, with the usual prayers for the dead, which we call 'Grassou an Anaoun'. The two coffins were taken to the church and placed on the catafalque (bier). The inhabitants of the village were informed and came in great numbers to the vigil, bringing with them many wreaths of flowers.

The next morning, at 10 o'clock, the religious ceremony took place in the church, a church full of people from Folgoët, Lesneven, Ploudaniel, eager to demonstrate their sympathy for

the airmen, and to represent their own relatives who had been detained (in forced labour) far away. Twelve German soldiers in full uniform in an attitude of absolute immobility, stood to the right and left of the catafalque, charged with transporting the corpses from the church to the cemetery, at their head, a Sergeant, M. Bittner, who was formerly a priest of the Dom Bosco congregation in Silesia. At the exit of the church, a Guard of Honour of sixty German soldiers led by an adjutant (major), in charge of paying full military honours, joined our procession which marched in an impressive order. At the head of the procession was the parish cross carried by two young men, then, in two rows, twenty boys, followed by twenty girls. then, in two rows, twenty boys, followed by twenty girls carrying bouquets, six choristers dressed in black, six clergymen, behind whom were two soldiers carrying a black cross adorned with flowers, on each of the two crosses an inscription in German: 'An einen unbekanntem englischen Flieger' [To an unknown English airman]. Then came the two coffins carried, each on the shoulders of six soldiers, then the 60 men of the Guard of Honour, and behind them the crowd of friends and sympathisers from the country of Brittany.

A magnificent ceremony, which will be remembered for a long time, and which honours both the German soldiers of the occupying army and the inhabitants of Le Folgoët. Requiescant in pace, amici nostri . Canon Jean Marie GUEGUEN - Rector of Le Folgoët.



The funeral procession, August 1943



Commemoration of the 80th anniversary of VE Day, 8th May 2023



The Mayor of Le Folgoët and Ryan Gibbons - a cousin of Flt Lt Brian Biddulph - unveil Brian's name on the airmen's memorial



Following an old tradition established by The Black Watch and the local French unit, the 19th Régiment d'Infanterie, Mr Pete Small scatters Scottish earth on the grave of Flt Lt John Small. The tradition goes back to World War One, when The Black Watch and 19RI exchanged vases containing the earth of Aberfeldy and Le Folgoët, after taking over the line at La Boisselle in 1915

John Duncan concludes:

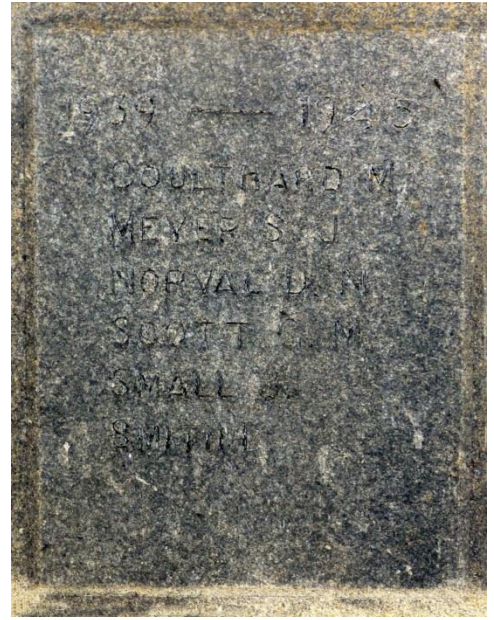
“This is in many ways a tragic story, but also an inspiring one. There are seven known 266 Rhodesia Squadron crash sites in our county, including Richard “Bundu” Thompson who was the subject of a special exhibition this summer in the village of Gouesnou, where he is buried; plus a number whose planes fell into the sea, including in a cruel irony of fate, Sandy MacIntyre’s successor, Peter Lefevre DFC, who was shot down at sea, six months later, just a few miles from where his predecessor’s plane had crashed. These men came from so far away to fight for freedom. Their sacrifice is not forgotten by local Breton people. Through the combined efforts of individuals from all over the world, these young men have now been brought to life as people with whom the younger generations can identify, rather than simply names on a tombstone.”

During the commemoration, John laid a poppy wreath on behalf of the members of the Rhodesian Services Association.

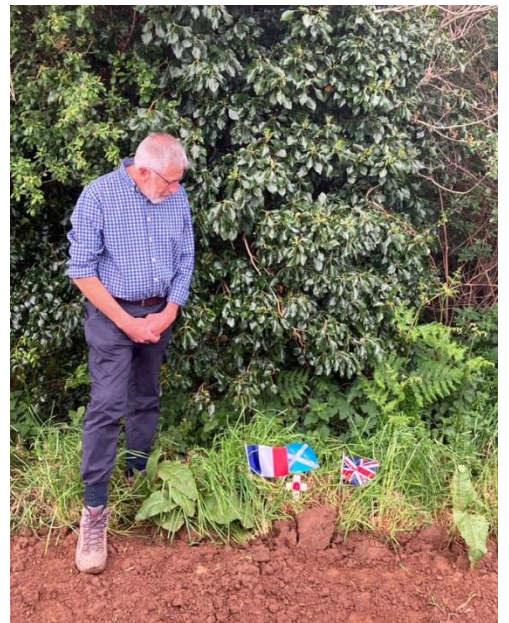




The Shamva war memorial



The crash sites





~ Compiled by John Duncan and Jackie Jackson

Commemoration photos: Ryan Gibbons

Members of the Biddulph and Small families were located through the research efforts of RhSA members:

Hugh Bomford

Jackie Jackson

John Loades

'Grunter' Robertson

Gerry van Tonder

This newsletter is compiled by Jackie Jackson for the Rhodesian Services Association,
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To view previous newsletters, go to our [Archives](#)

Views, language, and information expressed in *The Sentinel* may not reflect current understanding, they are provided in a historical context.

The Lion and Tusk Museum is a collection of historical, cultural, artistic, and scientific information displays, videos, photos, and writings. These depict Rhodesia and Rhodesians of all races, from the late 19th century until the country's transition to Zimbabwe in 1980. Neither the museum management, nor its team of volunteers, have political, racial, or gender-specific agendas, and they unreservedly condemn any scandal-mongering misconceptions to the contrary.



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